

INFLUENCE OF THE CHRIST ON GANDHI

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*Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
Degree of*

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Declaration

I, **Anisha Limbu**, hereby declare that the research work embodied in the dissertation titled "**Influence of the Christ on Gandhi**" submitted to **Sikkim University** for the award degree of **Masters of Philosophy**, is my original work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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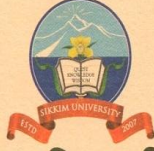
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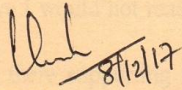
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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**Influence of the Christ on Gandhi**” submitted to the **Sikkim University** for partial fulfillment of the degree of the **Masters of Philosophy** in the **Department of History**, embodies the result of bonafide research work carried out by **Ms. Anisha Limbu** under my guidance and supervisor. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by her

We recommend this dissertation to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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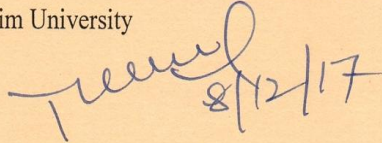
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- **Anisha Limbu**

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INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi has been portrayed as “a tinctured image of Jesus Christ”¹ and “a neo-Christian Hindu”.² Even his contemporary, Sri Aurobindo could not stop himself from depicting Gandhi as “a Russian Christian in an Indian body”.³ These labels on Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a vaishnava born boy from a small district of Porbandar who grew up to be the Mahatma generate a need to explore Gandhi more. A large part of the study on Gandhi tends to overlook Gandhi’s attitude to religion which in reality holds the key to understand his life and thought. In addition, very little light is shed on the influence of the Christ on the making of the Mahatma.

Gandhi knew about Christianity from his boyhood. He records in his autobiography (*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*), the reasons for his “dislike for Christianity” during his high school days. However his views changed after he went to England to study and subsequently to South Africa to set up legal practice. It was as a law student in England, that he read the Bible for the first time and the Sermon on the Mount touched him beyond measure. It was in South Africa where we see the development of his views regarding Christ and Christianity. He came in direct contact with Christians like Albert Weir Baker and Michael Coates, who approached him with an aim to convert him to Christianity; this awakened the religious quest in him to make a careful study of his own religion and as far as he could of other religions as well.⁴ Gandhi was mostly influenced by the heterodox view of Christianity. He could not accept Jesus Christ to be the only way to salvation. He

¹Lelyveld, Joseph, (2015) *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, Harper Collins India, Noida, p.7.

²Ibid.p.63.

³Cited by Lelyveld, Joseph, op.cit., p.37

⁴Gandhi, M.K., (2014) *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Rupa Publication, Noida, p. 124-135.

believed all religions to be the way to reach the one supreme God. Texts written by heterodox Christians, *The Perfect way* by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland and Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is within You* made a great impression on him. Another book that touched him a great deal was John Ruskin's *Unto the Last*.⁵

It was in South Africa that the religious spirit within Gandhi became a living force,⁶ where Gandhi moved from orthodoxy to heterodoxy in religion, from lawyering to activism in professional life.⁷ Examining his days in South Africa assists us in dissecting how he comprehended Christ and the Christ influenced him in his step to Mahatma. His South African days made him the Mahatma where his idea of Satyagraha first took its step. It was here in South Africa where we find his thoughts to be moulded which later came to be known as Gandhism.

In the heterogeneous South African society, Gandhi made lasting friendship with individuals of different ethnic and religious background. Their friendship continued, even after he returned to India, and took over the political scene. Out of Gandhi's four closest friends in South Africa, three were Jews⁸ and Hermann Kallenbach, was the closest of them that Gandhi had in South Africa during the period when he took the first step towards becoming the Mahatma. Shimon Lev titles their relation as "soulmates". Both men left South African shores to be together in India but circumstances did not allow them to be together. Their relation shows how much Kallenbach (Jew) had influenced Gandhi, as well as the Old Testament, which is the scripture of Judaism (known as Tanakh). This makes it noteworthy to consider, if

⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

⁶ Gandhi, M. K., op.cit., p. 135.

⁷ Guha, Ramachandra, (2014) *Gandhi Before India*, Penguin Books, Gurgaon, p. 81.

⁸ Ibid., 165.

there were any traces of the Old Testament in Mahatma, even though he is considered “the student of new Testament”.

Another lasting friendship Gandhi had was with a Christian missionary, C.F. Andrews. Joseph Lelyveld opines that Gandhi’s engagement with the British and American Missionaries helped insinuate a notion of social equality into Indian thought.⁹ A.J. Anandan also states that the zeal and sincerity of Christian missionaries taught him to reorder the Hindu way of life to take care of the poor, the sick and the so-called untouchables.¹⁰ This makes it essential to look into the influence of Christian missionaries and their humanitarian work had in the formulation of the social thought of Gandhi.

Although Gandhi made a mark on the political history of the country, he was “a man of faith”.¹¹ We find Gandhi’s religious philosophy was thoroughly grounded in Hinduism but we see the influence of various other factors. His first biographer, Joseph Doke, found his views to be closely allied to Christianity to be entirely Hindu and too deeply saturated with Hinduism to be called Christian.

He used to frequently quote the teachings of Jesus during his political career and social reformatory programs; as for example, Gandhi delivered a lecture at a meeting of the Muir Central College Economics Society in Allahabad on December 22, 1916 where he gave an example from the gospel about the rich man. He quoted Jesus: “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God”.¹² His political thoughts have been greatly influenced by the life of Jesus Christ and The

⁹Lelyveld, Joseph, op.cit., p. 36.

¹⁰Anandan A. J.,(1998) *God for All, God for Me*, SAIACS Publications, Bangalore, p. 81.

¹¹Ellsberg, Robert, (1991) *Gandhi on Christianity*, Orbis Books, New York, p. 93.

¹²Prabhu, R. K., (ed) (1959) Gandhi, M.K., *What Jesus Means to Me*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, pp. 19.

Holy Bible. Truth, non-violence and self-suffering, the major principles of Satyagraha were inspired by the life of Christ. He saw all of these in the life of Jesus and he called Christ the “Prince of Satyagrahis”.¹³ Gandhi too meticulously strived, all his life, to be a satyagrahi. He laid his life as an example to the people to read and to learn. Inspired by the sacrifice of the Christ, he too sacrificed his life for the freedom of the people. He understood the nature of the British rulers and how wrong and unlike Christ they were. He showed them the Christ like behavior against them in his march for freedom. The efforts of this great soul did lead to the sun setting in the British Empire.

The study looks into how Gandhi built up the image of the Christ as the greatest teacher humanity ever had. It brings out the influence Jesus Christ had in the growth of the religious Gandhi which in turn led to the making of the Mahatma. The study focuses on the religious Gandhi rather than the political Gandhi or Social Gandhi and how the religious aspect of Gandhi resulted into his involvement in political and social fields. Mahatma Gandhi has habitually been studied as a political man and many scholars hold the view that his social constructive works was to aid his political aims. Through this research, the concentration has been to shift to religious Gandhi rather than the political Gandhi and has tried to show his aims and aspirations.

Review of Literature

Gandhi from the time he came to be known as Mahatma, his life has been constantly linked with Christ. Dr. Hewlett Johnson opines that Gandhi was “one of the most

¹³Nanda, B. R., (1995) “*Gandhi and Religion*”, In Mahatma Gandhi 125 years by B.R. Nanda, New Age International Publishers Limited, New Delhi, p. 130.

Christ like lives”¹⁴ that he had come across. What makes it more amusing that even in his death; people could not stop themselves from connecting Christ and Gandhi together. Novelist Pearl S. Buck described “Gandhi’s assassination as another crucifixion”.¹⁵ Gandhi, a shy boy from the village of Porbandar, rose up to be the leader of the nation that changed the face of the freedom struggle. He did not become Mahatma in one day. His everyday life experiences added up to make him an outstanding man of contemporary age.

It was Gandhi’s South Africa experiences which made him the Mahatma; we can see this in the words of Nelson Mandela where he says: “You gave us Mohandas Gandhi; we returned him to you as Mahatma Gandhi”.¹⁶ It was here, in South Africa where we find his thoughts to be molded which later came to be known as Gandhism. Joseph Lelyveld asserts that South Africa became Gandhi’s laboratory, where the subject being tested was himself. Gandhi kept changing, experiencing a new epiphany every two year or so – Phoenix (1904), brahmacharya (1906), satyagraha (1908), Tolstoy Farm (1910) – each representing a milestone on the path he was blazing for himself. Satyagraha as a means of active struggle to achieve national goal, was what he carried in his otherwise meager baggage when he came out of South Africa.¹⁷ Parel states that by 1909, Gandhi had integrated all the essential ingredients of his political philosophy into a coherent whole, ingredients that were derived from East and West.¹⁸

¹⁴Chadha, Yogesh, (1997) *Rediscovering Gandhi*, Century Books Limited, United Kingdom, p. 313.

¹⁵Ibid., p.467.

¹⁶Kulkarni, Sudheendra. "Thank you South Africa."
<http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/thank-you-south-africa/> (accessed 10 4, 2016).

¹⁷ Lelyveld, Joseph, op.cit., pp. 18-19.

¹⁸Lev, shimon, (2013) *Soulmates: The story of Mahatma Gandhi and Herman Kallenbach*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, p.

It was also here in South Africa, his true knowledge about the Christ grew meeting with different Christian contacts even though the base had already been prepared when he was in England. He had read the Bible as a law student and the Sermon on the Mount was engraved in his heart for ever. South Africa made him learn more about Christ. Ramachandra Guha opines that leaving Kathiawar, Gandhi met with the agents of transformative process, whereby he moved from orthodoxy to heterodoxy in religion and from lawyering to activism in professional life.¹⁹ So South Africa was the testing ground for Gandhi to be transformed into the “Mahatma” of the people.

Gandhi’s life was rooted in Hinduism; yet Gandhi carried on an intense study of Christianity, especially in South Africa and this study had a major impact on the evolution of satyagraha.²⁰ South Africa was “the cradle of Satyagraha”²¹ and Jesus Christ for Gandhi was the “Prince of Satyagrahis”.²² His first biographer Joseph Doke, found his views to be closely allied to Christianity to be entirely Hindu and too deeply saturated with Hinduism to be called Christian. Gandhi's American disciple, Martin Luther King also wrote in his book *'Strength to Love'*, "The whole Gandhian concept of Satyagraha (which means Truth Force or Love Force) was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished and I came to see for the first time that the Christian doctrine of love, operating through the Gandhian method of non-violence is one of the most potent weapons available to an oppressed people in their

¹⁹Guha, Ramachandra, op.cit., p. 81.

²⁰Johnson, Richard L. and Ledbetter, Eric (1997) *"Spiritualizing the Political": Christ and Christianity in Gandhi's Satyagraha*, Peace & Change, Vol. 22 No. 1, p. 2.

²¹Story, Bishop Peter, (1995) *"Tribute to Mahatma"*, In Mahatma Gandhi 125 years, by B. R. nanda, New Age International Publishers Limited, New Delhi, p. 55.

²²Nanda, B. R., (1995) op.cit., p. 130.

struggle for freedom...Christ furnished the spirit and motivation and Gandhi furnished the method."²³

According to V. RamyaRajasri Kumar, Gandhi essentially learnt about the Bible in three stages; firstly in England with The Esoteric Christian Union, secondly with The Nonconformist Protestants, which include Wesleyans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers and Congregationalists in South Africa and thirdly reading Leo Tolstoy works mainly the "*The Kingdom of God is Within You*".²⁴ He in his article, *Contribution of the Holy Bible in the making of the Mahatma* have tried to show, Gandhi's interpretation of the Bible and the methods he adopted from the Bible as his principles for life.

Kathryn Tidrick brings to light that Gandhi's biographers have not taken seriously his connections with the Esoteric Christian Union and its doctrines have received little attention from Gandhi's scholar. She opines that Gandhi not only remained a convert to the basic doctrines of the Esoteric Christian Union but began to apply them to himself, as a Christ in the making. His writings are saturated in the ideology of Esoteric Christianity, and he used its terminology to express some of his most distinctive ideas and most personal aspirations. Gandhi's secretary, Pyarelal, who knew him intimately, told the Gandhi scholar James Hunt in 1978 that Esoteric Christianity had a 'specific and lasting influence on Gandhi's thought, and 'gave a very distinct colouring to his thoughts on some very vital aspects like Brahmacharya,

²³Nazareth, Pascal Alan. "Gandhi, Christ and Christianity." *mkgandhi*.
http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/gandhi_christ.html (accessed 7 2, 2016).

²⁴Kumar, V. RamyaRajasri, "*Contribution of the holy Bible in the making of the Mahatma*", IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Sciences , Vol, 19. No.184 (June 2014), p.6.

the doctrine of absolution through Christ's suffering and allegorical interpretations of the scriptures etc.'²⁵

Gandhi stated that, it was the Sermon on the Mount which endeared Jesus Christ to him. Gandhi saw it to be the whole of Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. Gandhi claims Jesus Christ to be "one of the greatest teacher humanity has ever had"²⁶. He writes in the Harijan how the example of Jesus' suffering was a factor in the composition of his undying faith in non-violence which rules all his actions, worldly and temporal.²⁷ Gandhi did not believe Jesus Christ to be the only way to salvation. He believed all religions to be the way to reach the one supreme God. He reveals in his autobiography, how it was impossible for him to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all.²⁸

Joseph Lelyveld opines that Gandhi's engagement with the British and American Missionaries helped insinuate a notion of social equality into Indian thought.²⁹ Gandhi renounced the world not to save his soul but to liberate the people of India and South Africa from imperialism, racial discrimination, poverty, and finally the loss of self-respect and self-confidence resulting from alien rule. That was his life's mission.³⁰ It is true that Christ made a profound impact in the life of Gandhi, which changed his life. Gandhi's life influenced by Christ and portraying Christ-like behavior to the world showed the Christians what it is to be a Christian.

²⁵Tidrick, Kathryn, (2008) *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life*, I. B. Tauris & Co, New York, p. 33, 45.

²⁶Prabhu, R. K., (ed) (1959) *Gandhi, M.K., What Jesus Means to Me*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, p. 8.

²⁷Ibid., p. 5.

²⁸ Gandhi, M. K., op.cit., p. 140.

²⁹ Lelyveld, Joseph, op.cit., p. 36.

³⁰Srinivas, M. N., (1995) "*Gandhi's Religion*" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 30, no. 25, p 1489.

Ignatius Jesudasan shows how Gandhi's Christology can be discovered in the context of the Christian concept of service to one's fellow humans, which was the guiding principle of his life. Gandhi's search through satyagraha was not for his own salvation but for communal growth in truth, involving whole races and peoples converging in mutual recognition and love. Gandhi saw social and political liberation as the manifestation of Christian contributions to his transformation of Hinduism. Therein he demonstrated the locus of his Christology in praxis or action. Gandhi made religious faith an ally and an instrument in the social and political liberation of human beings. Social and political liberation were correlatives to spiritual liberation.³¹

Ramu Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, argued that the attempt to secularize Gandhi was both mistaken and misleading. If we take the Mahatma's faith out of him, then Gandhi would not be the Mahatma. His religious beliefs were central to his political and social philosophy.³² Indeed as B.R. Nanda puts that it is a strange paradox that though Gandhi's attitude to religion holds the key to understanding of his life, its nuances and significance have been often missed by his admirers as well as critics.³³

Kathryn Tidrick opines that Gandhi entered politics, not to liberate his country in the sense understood by other Indian leaders and the western public which followed his career with such fascinated attention, but to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.³⁴ Ignatius Jesudasan opines that the popular association of Gandhi in India was

³¹Ellsberg, Robert, (1991) *Gandhi on Christianity*, Orbis Books, New York, p. 99.

³² Cited by Guha, Ramachandra. "His Faith, Our Faith." *Hindustan Times*. 1 29, 2008. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/his-faith-our-faith/story-sdpOimN69y2gTuSJs1SI.html> (accessed 10 1, 2016).

³³Nanda, B. R., op.cit., p. 130.

³⁴Tidrick, Kathryn, op.cit., p. xi.

not so much with the great names in world's political history, but with the great names in the religious history of the world. As influential as he was in shaping the political history of the country, Gandhi was looked upon primarily as a man of faith.³⁵

A.J. Anandan talks about the dualistic nature of Gandhi's religion; a personal God (Rama) and a general God whom he could share it with anyone (he called 'god for all'). He has tried to show that Gandhi's view on Indian Christianity, Christian missionaries and conversion never overcame his earlier prejudice, even though he claimed that his prejudice disappeared after he moved among good Christians in England and South Africa. He opines that Gandhi never outgrew his own personal religion.³⁶

There is a vacuum in the study of the influence of the Christ on the making of Mahatma and its influence on his political and social reformatory programs. The imprints of Christ in Gandhi and his thoughts needs to be taken up to observe the extent of influence it had on the making of Mahatma and how it shaped his political and social reformatory programs. It will provide us with new insight into the structure of the 'great soul' who is still looked as a guiding light in the contemporary world.

³⁵Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., p. 93.

³⁶Anandan A. J., (1998) *God for All, God for Me*, SAIACS Publications, Bangalore, p. 82.

Objectives of the Study

- To comprehend the phase where Christ's waves touched Gandhi's life.
- To examine the imprints of Jesus Christ in the life of Gandhi.
- Social reformative approach of Gandhi and imprints of Christianity on his philosophy.
- Gandhi's political programs and whether it was influenced by the 'life of Christ'.
- To analyse the Christology of Gandhi.

Methodology

The study has followed a qualitative method and thus involved a systematic reading of the texts and the context of the sources; this helped with the in-depth knowledge into the life of the Mahatma.

Selected readings of the digitalized volumes of The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG) and the primary writings of Gandhi served as an important primary source for this research. Gandhi has always been the interest of study, the literature (books, articles, journals, newspaper reports) by various scholars on Mahatma Gandhi and these have been the secondary sources for this research study.

Chapters

- Introduction

The introductory chapter has brought to light the importance of the study of influence of Christ in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. It introduces the objectives and the methods followed for the research.

- Chapter I

Christ's waves: England and South African days.

This chapter has tried to show the evolution of Gandhi's relationship with Christ from his boyhood days to his stay in England as a law student and subsequently in South Africa where he spent the most of his adult life. His boyhood days centers on his dislike for Christianity and how he had shifted somewhat to atheism. His stay in England as a law student where he read the bible for the first time and South Africa days where he came in close contact with the evangelical Christians and subsequently the heterodox view of Christianity to which he got inclined too. The focus of the chapter is to show the journey of his relationship with the Christ from dislike to the greatest teacher humanity ever had. So it is necessary to look into the waves of Christ that touched the shores of Gandhi that helped him to turn into the 'Great Soul'.

- Chapter II

Imprints Of The Christ In The Life Of Gandhi.

As Gandhi applied whatever appealed to him first in his life before preaching it to others, the chapter deals with the influence Jesus Christ had in his life and how Gandhi started following the teachings of Jesus Christ and started imitating Christ to accomplish his ultimate aim to see God face to face. So to accomplish his ultimate aim to see God face to face, he started imitating

Christ. The chapter brings out the imprints of the Christ on Gandhi's life of austerity, fasting, celibacy, forgiveness to ones adversity and self-suffering.

- Chapter III

Impact of Christ on Gandhi's programs

This chapter is divided into political and social reformatory programs of Gandhi.

Political programs - His South African days mark an important phase of his life, where we see Gandhi experimented with Satyagraha and took the first step of becoming Mahatma. Gandhi called Jesus Christ to be the "Prince of Satyagrahis" as he saw all the major principles of Satyagraha in Christ's life. This chapter has scrutinized the effect of doctrine of the Christ had in shaping Gandhi's thinking which later came to be known as Gandhism.

Social reformatory programs - Gandhi was not only a political leader but also a social reformer. Gandhi himself tells us that politics, indeed was not his primary concern, he took to latter only to help the former. .This chapter looks into how Gandhi endeavoured to see God through the service of humanity an idea that emerged with the restoration of Catholic faith. The concept of attainment of *moksha* through the service of humanity was a new concept, not heard of in Hinduism. This idea became more concrete when he read Leo Tolstoy. The imprints of Christ and Christianity in Gandhi's social reformatory program have been examined.

The chapter also looks into Gandhi's aim of the establishment of the Kingdom of heaven on earth or *moksha* for all humanity and how he took to political and social programs to include all human beings towards the attainment of *moksha*.

- Conclusion

Gandhi was not only a political leader or a social reformer but he was also a very religious person. Every step he took as a leader, a reformer was guided by his religious views. He spiritualized the political which made him an eminent leader of the century whose footprints are still being followed. The study has brought to light the importance of the Christ and the doctrine of the Christ on Gandhi as a whole and has analysed the Christology of Gandhi.

CHAPTER I

CHRIST'S WAVES: ENGLAND AND SOUTH AFRICAN DAYS

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a shy boy from the village of Porbandar, in Gujarat, rose up to be the 'Mahatma' of the people, whose arrival in the Indian political scene changed the face of the freedom struggle. His great soul touched the hearts of the common people and became one with them. Though a proclaimed Hindu, Gandhi from the time he came to be known as Mahatma, his life has been constantly linked with the Christ. It was not only because of the life he led as Mahatma, but also of his constant reference to Jesus Christ and his teachings, throughout his life to make the world a better place. Making his life the message to the world, Gandhi put into practice the teachings in his life before he preached it. He opened his life as an open book to be read by the world, to learn and implement it, so as to become and be better human beings. We come across the numerous traces of the Christ in the life of Mahatma, while examining the message he gave to the world. Joseph Lelyveld has pronounced Gandhi to be "a tintured image of Jesus Christ"¹ and "a neo-Christian Hindu".² Even his contemporary, Sri Aurobindo could not stop himself from depicting Gandhi as "a Russian Christian in an Indian body".³ What makes it more amusing is that even in his death, people could not stop themselves from connecting the Christ and Gandhi together. Novelist Pearl S. Buck described "Gandhi's assassination as another crucifixion".⁴ This makes it essential to look into the waves

¹Lelyveld, Joseph, (2015) *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, Harper Collins India, Noida, p.7.

² Ibid.p.63.

³ Cited by Lelyveld, Joseph, op.cit., p.37

⁴ Chadha, Yogesh, (1997) *Rediscovering Gandhi*, Books Limited, United Kingdom, p.467.

of Jesus Christ that touched Gandhi's shores that aided him to be Mahatma. The decisive period of his life before his Mahatmaship should be looked in detail to see how the Christ's waves touched Gandhi.

Boyhood Days

Born and brought up in Porbandar, till the age of seven, Gandhi had not heard of the Christ; nor had he of the religion known as Christianity. It was in Rajkot, that he, for the first time became acquainted with Christians and Christianity. Porbander did not have any churches whereas Rajkot had several churches and a mission run by Irish Presbyterians. The family had moved to Rajkot to join Kaba Gandhi, the father, who had been appointed as the Diwan of Rajkot.⁵ Even though born in a family of vaishnava faith, the family environment in which he grew created in him 'a toleration of all faiths'. His mother and father used to take Gandhi and his siblings to visit not only Vishnu's Haveli but also Shiva's and Rama's. Their house was open to people of different religions; Jain monks often visited his father and so did his father's Musalman and Parsi friends who would talk of their faith. His father used to listen to them and this he always did with respect.⁶ The life his mother, Putalibai, lived everyday also combined to make an imprint in young Mohandas's life.

Years later, writing about his mother, he portrays her as a deeply religious and saintly person. His mother would not take her food without her daily prayers. One of her daily duties was to visit the Haveli, the Vaishnava temple. During *Chaturmas*, she would take the hardest vows, to take a single meal a day or fast alternative days and

⁵ Guha, Ramachandra, (2014) *Gandhi Before India*, Penguin Books, Gurgaon, p.25.

⁶ Gandhi, M.K., (2014) *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Rupa Publication, Noida, p.34.

other times she would not have food without seeing the sun.⁷ Putibhai though was a devout follower of these practices of the Hindu faith was not dogmatic. Although born and raised a *Vaishnavite*, she also became attracted to a sect called the *Pranamis*, who incorporated elements of Islam into their worship.⁸

In Rajkot, his broad-minded unorthodox parents inculcated in his young mind tolerance for all faiths, but Christianity became an exception for him. Early experience in his high school days, formulated his first perception about the Christians and Christianity. He narrates how the Christian missionaries used to preach near the High School, pouring abuses on Hindus and their Gods. He visualizes his experiment that he did one day, to hear the Christian missionaries but that was enough to dissuade him from repeating it again. He could not take in the abuses on Hindus and their gods poured out by the Christian missionaries. About the same time, he heard about a well-known Hindu who got converted to Christianity. It amazed him, when he learned that after baptism the newly converted had to eat beef, drink liquor and wear European clothes including a hat. He also heard how the new converts went about abusing the religion of their ancestors, their customs and their country. For him, Christianity became a religion that did not deserve the name.⁹

He had developed a sort of dislike for Christianity in his boyhood days. The fact is that, he had only become familiar with Christianity that was prevalent, at that time, in Rajkot. An Irish Presbyterian based in Rajkot, noticing that ‘the Brahmans and Vaniyas were everywhere looked up to as the intellectual class’, thought the

⁷ Ibid., pp.4-5.

⁸ Guha, Ramachandra, op.cit., p.24.

⁹ Gandhi, M.K., op.cit., p.35.

conversion of upper-caste men could spark a mass exodus from the Hindu fold.¹⁰ The missionaries focused on the numbers of converts to the Christian fold but failed to convey to the people the real meaning of being a Christian. Christianity that had got established in the eyes of the contemporary Indians was the religion of the rulers and a religion that compelled the converts to eat beef and drink liquor. However, Gandhi's stay in England and South Africa, in later years, brought him in direct contact with the Christ, and made him understand what it was to be a real Christian. Even though Gandhi had learnt to become tolerant towards other religions, he did not have 'any living faith in God' but had shifted 'somewhat towards atheism' at that point of time in his life. What led this atheist inclined man to be one who was religious to the core, so much to be accused of shipping religion into politics? The experiences he had in England and more so subsequently in South Africa made him the man of faith. We shall look into the experiences that he went through in England and South Africa to understand the Mahatma Gandhi more vividly.

England Days

Rajkot introduced Gandhi to a religion known as Christianity; England likewise helped him to encounter Jesus Christ, face to face, for the first time. As he entered adulthood, the young version of his 'dislike for Christianity' slowly started to alter, as he personally came to understand the Christ and his teachings. He landed on the shores of England on 29 September, 1888 and registered himself at the Inner temple, one of the four Inns of Court in London, to qualify himself as a barrister.

Gandhi was a man of experiments; he experimented with his life till the very last breath of his life. In England, he did not stick to himself but experimented with

¹⁰Guha, Ramachandra.op.cit., p. 27.

himself in this new environment. During the first part of his stay in London, we find him experimenting of being an English gentleman by introducing himself to lessons in dancing; French elocution and playing the violin. After some time he gave up the idea and put his mind to on, what he had come to England for. His experiments ranged from food habits to leading an austere life; living on 4 pounds a month. London provided him the platform, for the first time, away from the enclosed orthodox space of his own home in Rajkot and the town, to experiment and mingle with people from various places, with diverse thoughts and religious practice. Guha opines that in religious terms, Gandhi's London experience was quite varied. He socialized with Hindus and with Theosophists, saw the old atheist, and even attended service at a Congregational Church in Holborn.¹¹

A good Christian from Manchester, whom he met in a vegetarian boarding house, towards the end of his second year in England, asked him to read the Bible; that was when Gandhi shared with him, during one of his conversations, his prejudice that Christianity compelled eating beef and drinking liquor by Christians. He jots down his first experience of reading the Bible in his autobiography:

I began reading it, but I could not possibly read through the Old Testament. I read the book of Genesis, and the chapters that followed invariably sent me to sleep. But just for the sake of being able to say that I had read it, I plodded through the other books with much difficulty and without the least interest or understanding. I disliked reading the book of Numbers. But the New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart.¹²

The Sermon on the Mount is found in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. It includes the teachings of Jesus Christ which he gave to his disciples sitting on top of the mountain. Two particular verses from Matthew 5: 39-40 which

¹¹Ibid., p.51.

¹² Gandhi, M.K., op.cit., p.72.

reads, “But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also,” delighted him beyond measure.¹³ Gandhi, in an address at the YMCA in Colombo, Ceylon, in 1927 asserted that if he had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and his own interpretation of it, then he would not hesitate to say, “Oh, yes, I am a Christian.”¹⁴ On the Christmas Day of 1931, when Gandhi was voyaging back to India, after attending the Second Round Table Conference in London, he gave a talk at the request of Christian fellow-passengers who used to attend the daily morning prayers conducted by him. Gandhi, reminiscing about his first acquaintance with Jesus Christ and the Sermon on the Mount says,

When I came to the New Testament and the Sermon on the Mount, I began to understand the Christian teachings...I had then been given to understand was that to be a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other. The Sermon on the Mount, however, falsified the impression. As my contact with real Christians i.e., men living in fear of God, increased, I saw that the Sermon on the Mount was the whole of Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. It is the Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me.¹⁵

The ‘Sermon on the Mount’ became the life giving words in the life of the Mahatma. Gandhi took inspiration from the Sermon and applied it in his life towards his spiritual growth and Louis Fisher does not hesitate to claim that other verses from the mount too “struck a sympathetic chord in the Mahatma-to-be”.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., p.71.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.417.

¹⁵ Prabhu, R. K., (ed) (1959) Gandhi, M.K., *What Jesus Means to Me*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, pp.12-13.

¹⁶ Fisher, Louis, (2016) *The life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Harper Collins, Noida, p.53.

It was in England, that he got acquainted with different religions; he read the translated version of the Gita for the first time – The Song Celestial – and Light of Asia by Sir Edward Arnold. His young mind tried to merge their teachings and came to the conclusion that “renunciation was the highest form of religion”.¹⁷ The Christians he came in contact in England were mainly Nonconformists and tolerant who did not insist him to convert to Christianity. He attended the church services, where he heard the preaching of well-known Nonconformists such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Dr. Joseph Parker.¹⁸ It became a daunting task for him to continue his religious readings while studying for his bar examinations, which was indeed his principal focus. He kept in his mind to read more religious books and acquaint himself with all the principal religions. South Africa provided him with the time and the environment to further his study.

South African Days

Gandhi had failed to establish himself in India as a legal practitioner and when the proposal of going to South Africa as a lawyer to a firm of Dada Abdulla & Co., came his way, he could not deny it. He wanted, somehow, to leave India and did not want to miss the opportunity to see a new country and have new experiences. What looked like a mere excuse to flee from the political troubles at home and to earn a decent sum of money turned into the stay of two decades and a year.¹⁹ The years of experience in South Africa added up to make the formative period of his life. He had left as a failed lawyer but returned to India as the Mahatma of the people. It was there that he had completely formulated all the elements of his political and social reformative

¹⁷ Gandhi, M. K., op.cit., p.71.

¹⁸ Mehta, Ved, (2013) *Mahatma Gandhi and his Apostles*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, p. 104.

¹⁹ Guha, Ramachandra, op.cit., p.63.

programs. Gandhi had also successfully experimented his weapon of Satyagraha there which he used extensively back in India in the course of the freedom Struggle. The experiences he went through in South Africa made him the Mahatma. South Africa provided him with ‘unwitting agents of a transformative process whereby he moved from orthodoxy to heterodoxy in religion, from lawyering to activism in professional life’.²⁰ So, looking at the experiences he went through with the Christ and Christians in South Africa will help us to construct the relationship between Gandhi and the Christ more distinctly.

It was also there in South Africa, Gandhi declares, that ‘the religious spirit within me became a living force’.²¹ In England, he read the religious books but the religious aspects of it did not take up his thinking. Whereas, during his first year in South Africa, when the work of a lawyer that did not engage him wholly, gave him time to absorb himself in the religious study. Here, he intended to make a careful study of his own religion and as far as he could, of other religions as well.²² Gandhi did not get the time to contemplate on the Christ and his teachings in England; whereas South Africa provided more push to his knowledge of the Christ. South Africa brought him closer to the Christ; even though, he did not take the path carved out by his Christian friends.

Evangelical Christian Contacts

In South Africa, Gandhi came in contact with the Nonconformist Protestants, which included Wesleyans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers and Congregationalists and all

²⁰Ibid., p.81.

²¹ Gandhi, M. K., op.cit., p.135.

²² Ibid., p.124.

those were instrumental in influencing Gandhi to read the Bible and understand both Jesus Christ and Christianity in general.²³ The first Christian, Gandhi came in contact with, after he landed in South Africa was Albert Weir Baker. He was the lawyer in charge of Dada Abdulla's case. He was an active lay preacher. He had been a carpenter before he became a lawyer but his real passion was taking the Word of God to the natives. He published a magazine, *Africa's Golden Harvest*, which promoted 'spiritual and missionary enterprise'. Preaching in mines, prisons and hospitals, Baker converted some Africans, who then went out into the north, further spreading the Word. He himself sometimes travelled into the country to preach the Word.²⁴ He claimed that 'it is impossible to find eternal peace, unless one accepts Jesus as the only son of God and the Saviour of mankind'. On their very first meeting in Pretoria, Baker asked Gandhi of his religious views and asked him to attend the one o'clock prayer meeting, where he had been meeting with his fellow co-workers everyday, for a few minutes and prayed for peace and light. Mr. Baker introduced him to other Christians with whom Gandhi discussed and debated about their respective faith.

Michael Coats, who was a Quaker, took great interest in Gandhi and gave him numerous books to read, some of them were *Commentary* of Dr. Parker of the City Temple, Pearson's *Many Infallible Proofs*, and Butler's *Analogy*. But these books did not make any impression on Gandhi. Gandhi could not come to agree with the "arguments in proof of Jesus being the only incarnation of God and the Mediator between God and man". Gandhi goes on to say that Mr. Coates was not the man who

²³ Kumar, V. RamyaRajasri, (2014) "*Contibution of the holy Bible in the making of the Mahatma*", IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Sciences , <http://iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol19-issue6/Version-2/B019620512.pdf> ,Vol, 19. No.184 (June), p.6.

²⁴ Guha, Ramachandra, op.cit.,p.69.

would easily accept defeat. He tried to break the Vaishnava necklace of Tulsi-beads around Gandhi's neck, of immense sentimental value to Gandhi, that his mother had gifted him. Mr. Coates thought it to be superstition and wanted to take out Gandhi from the ways of ignorance. Mr. Coates introduced Gandhi to other Christians including the Plymouth Brethren who told him that only one who accepts Jesus will attain great redemption and can have eternal peace. Gandhi replied by saying: "If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians, I cannot accept. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless".²⁵

Mr. Baker, concerned with the way his Hindu friend was taking, took him to the Wellington Convention, which was organized by Protestant Christians for religious enlightenment, restoration or revival. Gandhi gave an assurance to Baker that nothing would prevent him from embracing Christianity, if his 'inner voice' told him to do so. He saw no reason, otherwise, for changing his belief – his religion. Gandhi's difficulties were regarding the accepted interpretation of the Bible, that salvation was impossible unless he accepted Christianity. Gandhi says:

My difficulties lay deeper. It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate Son of God, and that only he who believed in him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were his sons. If Jesus was like God, or God himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself.²⁶

It was impossible for him to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions. He fails to understand that conversion to Christianity does not lead to salvation but accepting Christ as one's personal Saviour. Being a Christian

²⁵ Gandhi, M. K., op.cit., pp.125-129.

²⁶ Ibid., p.140.

means being more Christ-like. In fact, the disciples were not called Christians either by Christ or did they call themselves Christians. Seeing their Christ-like behavior, “the disciples were called Christians first time in Antioch”.²⁷

In Durban, Gandhi came in contact with Mr. Spencer Walton, the head of the South African General Mission, who like other evangelical Christians did not ask Gandhi to embrace Christianity but placed his life as an open book before Gandhi. Gandhi enjoyed the company of Mr. and Mrs. Walton for their humility, perseverance and their devotion to their work and met with them frequently. About the same time, Gandhi came in contact with the Askews family, Methodists by faith, and attended the Wesleyan Church every Sunday with them. He records his experience:

The church did not make a favourable impression on me. The sermon seemed to be uninspiring. The congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious. They were not an assembly of devout souls; they appeared rather to be worldly-minded people, going to church for recreation and in conformity to custom. Here, at times, I would involuntarily doze. I was ashamed, but some of my neighbours, who were in no better case lightened the shame. I could no longer go on like this, and soon gave up attending the service.²⁸

The connection with the family broke as he was asked not to visit them again. As Mrs Askew could not take in Gandhi’s idea of comparing the life of Jesus Christ with that of the Buddha and his vegetarianism, she thought had produced ill effect in the life of her son.²⁹

Heterodox Christian Contacts

Gandhi was unable to accept the Christ as the begotten son of God who redeems the people from the sin and gives eternal life. It was during his second year in South Africa that he got inclined to the unorthodox interpretation of Christianity. In

²⁷ Holy Bible, New King James Version, Holman Bible Publishers, Tennessee, p.857.

²⁸ Gandhi, M. K., op.cit., pp.163-165.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 165.

November 1894, he claims himself to be the Agent for the Esoteric Christian Union, putting up the list of books for sale for the first time in South Africa.³⁰ Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland had been leaders of the British Theosophical Society but eventually left it because of their overwhelming interest in Christianity and formed the sect of the ECU. Gandhi had carried on a long correspondence with Maitland and as a result joined the movement. Maitland sent him a copy of his and Kingsford's book, *The Perfect Way or the Finding of Christ*, and his own *The New Interpretation of the Bible*. Gandhi liked the books because 'they seemed to support Hinduism'. The books accepted the rebirth and the essential unity of God and the individual soul, reconciling Christianity with other religions.³¹ The Kingsford-Maitland view of Christianity appealed to Gandhi because it asked not for exaltation of a personal Saviour, but fidelity to one's conscience. That the principal author was a convinced vegetarian and that it had nice things to say about his ancestral faith, added to its appeal to Gandhi.³²

Kathryn Tidrick brings to light that Gandhi's biographers have not taken seriously his connections with the Esoteric Christian Union and its doctrines have received little attention from Gandhi scholar. She opines that Gandhi not only remained a convert to the basic doctrines of the Esoteric Christian Union but began to apply them to himself, as a Christ in the making. His writings are saturated in the ideology of Esoteric Christianity, and he used its terminology to express some of his most distinctive ideas and most personal aspirations. Gandhi's secretary, Pyarelal, who knew him intimately, told the Gandhi scholar James Hunt in 1978 that Esoteric

³⁰ Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume 1, Gandhi Serve Foundation, p.184.

³¹ Weber, Thomas, (2007) *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, p32.

³² Guha, Ramachandra, *op.cit.*, p.84.

Christianity had a 'specific and lasting influence on Gandhi's thought, and 'gave a very distinct colouring to his thoughts in some very vital aspects like *Brahamacharya*, the doctrine of absolution through Christ's suffering and allegorical interpretations of the scriptures.'³³

Another book written by heterodox Christians that impressed Gandhi was Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. The book overwhelmed him by its independent thinking, profound morality and truthfulness. This book made all the books given by Mr. Coates insignificant.³⁴ The book revolves around the one central powerful message that a good Christian follows his conscience rather than the laws imposed by the tsars, bishops and generals.

Tolstoy contrasted the teachings of the Christ with the practices of the established Church. Christ abhorred violence, while the Church promoted war and capital punishment. Christ's essence was to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, which exalted the poor, the meek, the righteous and the peace-makers, mandated that 'thou shalt not kill', and urged one to love one's enemies and pray for them. The bishops, on the other hand, followed the Nicene Creed, which represented Christ as judgmental and made the Church infallible, insisted on absolute obedience from its members.³⁵ Gandhi found in Tolstoy confirmation of his own inclination to distinguish freely between the message of Jesus and the teachings and practice of the Christian church.³⁶

³³Tidrick, Kathryn, (2008) *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life*, I. B. Tauris & Co, New York, p. 33, 45.

³⁴ Gandhi, M. K., op.cit., pp.141-142.

³⁵ Guha, Ramachandra, op.cit., pp.84-85.

³⁶ Ellsberg, Robert, (1991) *Gandhi on Christianity*, Orbis Books, New York, p. xii.

Impact of Christian Contacts

Writing years later, Gandhi cherishes his Christian contacts and feels forever indebted to them for having the 'religious quest' awakened in him even though he did not take the path intended by them for him.³⁷ Gandhi had made a decision to make a dispassionate study of all the religions and not to think of embracing another religion before he fully understood his own. He was not sure as to how far would he be able to take the study of Christianity. Without knowing his own religion, he contemplated, that he would not be able to understand Christianity in its proper perspective.³⁸ In his open-mindedness, Mohandas was following his mother; yet as a man, with a freedom to travel denied her, he could take this ecumenism further and deeper, through meeting people of different faiths and by reading their texts as well. He read Christian and Islamic texts, furthering his knowledge and perhaps his confusion.³⁹

When his mind got caught up in the complexity of religious belief in later days, he always turned to his friend, Raychandbhai, back home. Gandhi had become acquainted with Raychandbhai in 1891, when he landed at Bombay after completing his studies in England. They were introduced to each other by Dr. Pranjivan Metha; Raychandbhai was the son-in-law of an elder brother of Dr. Metha. Gandhi was greatly impressed by Raychandbhai. He engaged Gandhi in serious religious conversations. Although a jeweler by profession, he had a wide knowledge of the scriptures. He knew the Jain and Hindu scriptures intimately and had also read many texts in Gujarati on Islam and Christianity.⁴⁰

³⁷ Gandhi, M. K., op.cit., p.142.

³⁸ Ibid., p.125.

³⁹ Guha, Ramachandra, op.cit., p.83.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.56.

Reading the Christian texts and the pressure of his Christian friends on him to convert to Christianity, put Gandhi in a dilemma. Before June 1894, he wrote to Raychandbhai with a list of questions to help him solve the puzzle that rambled on his head.

What is the Soul? Does it perform actions? Do past actions impede its progress or not? What is God? Is He the Creator of the universe? What is moksha?... Do you know anything about Christianity? If so, what do you think of it? The Christians hold that the Bible is divinely inspired and that Christ was an incarnation of God, being His son. Was He? Were all the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Christ?...⁴¹

Raychandbhai became his 'guide and helper' in the time of trouble and advised him to stay within the Hindu fold, yet remain open to teachings of other religions. Gandhi stayed true to Raychandbhai's advice but opened his heart to understand Jesus Christ, Christians and Christianity.

Gandhi admitted to Millie Polak, "I did once seriously think of embracing Christianity;" Millie was the wife of a Henry Polak who was part of his inner circle during Gandhi's last ten years in South Africa. So what made him change his feelings? He reveals "I was tremendously attracted to Christianity, but eventually I came to the conclusion that there was nothing really in your scripture that we had not got in ours, and that to be a good Hindu also meant I would be a good Christian."⁴² He gives out more reasons, when the Christian missionary E. Stanley Jones asked him the reason for his constant rejection on becoming the follower of Christ when he himself quotes Christ so often. Gandhi's response was clear "Oh, I don't reject your

⁴¹ CWMG, Volume 1, op.cit., p.143.

⁴² Lelyveld, Joseph, op.cit., p.8.

Christ. I love your Christ. It is just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ”.⁴³

What was his experience with Christians? His rejection grew out of the experience he had in South Africa. The behavior of the Christians to discriminate people according to the colour of their skin or anything for that matter was not a Christ like behaviour. He wrote to the editor of Times of Natal, regarding this issue headed as “Rammysammy” which itself showed ‘contempt towards the poor Indians’.

You would look to the exterior only. So long as the skin is white it would not matter to you whether it conceals beneath it poison or nectar. To you the lip-prayer of the Pharisee, because he is one, is more acceptable than the sincere repentance of the publican, and this, I presume, you would call Christianity. You may; it is not Christ's.... If He (Christ) came among us, will he not say to many of us, “I know you not”? Sir, may I venture to offer a suggestion? Will you re-read your New Testament? Will you ponder over your attitude towards the coloured population of the Colony? Will you then say you can reconcile it with the Bible teaching or the best British traditions?⁴⁴

After Gandhi had been in Pretoria for about three months, he wrote to the Natal Advertiser, a newspaper published in Durban, ‘It seems on the whole, that their (Indians) simplicity, their total abstinence from intoxicants, their peaceful and above all their businesslike frugal habits, which should serve as a recommendation, are really at the bottom of all this contempt and hatred of the poor Indian traders. And they are British subjects. Is this Christian-like, is this fair play, is this justice, is this civilization?’⁴⁵ He did not find the behavior of Christians, so called, following the Bible and the teachings of the Christ. This is what made him step back and ponder upon the religion known as Christianity. This does not mean that he returned to India

⁴³ “Gandhi’s message to Christians”, *mkgandhi*, http://www.mkgandhi.org/africaneedsgandhi/gandhi's_message_to_christians.htm (accessed on 7th February, 2016)

⁴⁴ CWMG, Volume 1, op.cit., p.183.

⁴⁵ Mehta, Ved, (1976) *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, p. 151.

disliking Christianity. He only disliked Christianity as a religion because the Christians were unlike Christ.

The behavior of the Indian Christians also made him sit back and ponder upon the religion known as Christianity. The Indian Christians in South Africa, who were mostly educated, separated themselves from the Indian community and did not help them in the matters of legislation but worked as the puppets of the Government. Hearing about these things from Abdulla Seth, Gandhi meditates ‘Was this the meaning of Christianity? Did they cease to be Indians because they have become Christians?’⁴⁶ Gandhi found ‘Christianity synonymous with denationalization and Europeanization’⁴⁷ looking at the life of the Indian Christians. This was also one of the reasons why Gandhi hated conversion activity of the missionaries. Gandhi always gave a call to be better Christians, better Hindus and better Muslims instead of conversion from one religion to another. The life of Indian Christians did not give out the message of the Christ and Christ’s Christianity according to him.

The British Raj in India was also not the best example of a Heavenly Kingdom. Gandhi writes in *Young India* dated 8th September, 1920:

The very national anthem of England is anti- Christian. Jesus, who asked his followers to love their enemies even as themselves, could not have sung of his enemies, “Confound his enemies, frustrate their knavish tricks.”⁴⁸

Though the Raj called themselves Christians, they failed to follow the biblical way of life. So they failed to follow the precept of the Gospel of Christ in their own lives. Their ruthless and cruel behavior towards the Indians and the people under the

⁴⁶Gandhi, M.K., op.cit., p. 143.

⁴⁷Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., p. 42.

⁴⁸Prabhu, R. K. (ed). op.cit.,p.32.

British rule triggered an angst against Christianity. It became just an empty religion that held not the truth of The Bible, but everything against it. The Bible speaks against greed, deception, covetousness and their behavior shows their disobedience to God's Word. Gandhi was in the right path when he says, "I consider Western Christianity in its practical working a negation of Christ's Christianity".⁴⁹

Gandhi's difficulties with Christianity were both theological and ethical.⁵⁰ Gandhi himself says that though he admired much in Christianity, he was unable to identify himself with the orthodox Christianity.⁵¹ He could not bring himself to regard Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God who redeems human beings from sin nor could he accept his salvation was hinged to the confession of his sins. At the same time, the behavior of Christians left him in doubt that their religion had any superior claim to be uniquely true. The Christian contacts in Pretoria, Durban and Johannesburg helped him differentiate between the Christ's Christianity and the Christianity of the world. Gandhi's dislike for Christianity lingered in him; but his days in South Africa made him revere the Christ and his doctrine. Though Gandhi carved out his own spiritual path to be one with the Almighty and proclaimed to be a Hindu to the core, his life gives out the essence of Christ. The next chapter will deal with the imprints of the Christ in the life Gandhi and how he began living the Christ in his everyday life.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.32.

⁵⁰ Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., p.xi.

⁵¹ Prabhu, R. K. (ed). op.cit.,p. 13.

CHAPTER II

IMPRINTS OF THE CHRIST IN THE LIFE OF GANDHI

The previous chapter dealt with the waves of the Christ that touched Gandhi in three distinct phases of his life; his boyhood in Rajkot, in England while his study and his South African Days, where he came to understand the religion known as Christianity and came in contact with Christians with their own interpretation of Jesus Christ. Gandhi came to understand the real teachings of the Christ and what it was to be a true Christians. He read the Bible and other Christian books passed out to him by his Christian friends with a view to convert Gandhi into Christianity. He did not take the path visualized by his Christian friends but he started applying the teachings of the Christ in his life and his life gives out the fragrance of the Christ. This Chapter will mostly deal with the impact of the Christ in the life of Gandhi and how Gandhi started applying the teachings of Jesus Christ in his life. This had happened in the third phase in South Africa.

In this course, it was Gandhi's wish to die with the name of Ram on his lips. Gandhi declared himself to be a staunch Hindu. He never moved away from the teachings he had internalised from his boyhood days, by his nurse Rambha who taught him the need for a deep faith in Ram and repetition of Ram's name was the ultimate solution to all ills and problems. Ram was for Gandhi a personal God. Although he considered Ram his personal God, Gandhi's ideals and strategies came from the Christ and Christianity; he did not draw intellectually or strategically from Rama. Gandhi's view on Indian Christianity, Christian missionaries and conversion never overwhelmed his earlier prejudice, even though he claimed that his prejudice disappeared after he moved among good Christians in England and South Africa. A

section of the Gandhian scholars hold that Gandhi never outgrew his own personal religion.¹

It can be argued that Gandhi's prejudice against Christianity remained with him; but he held a high regard for Jesus Christ and his doctrine remained in Gandhi unto his last. He himself declared, "What, then does Jesus mean to me? To me, He was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had".² Gandhi could not come in alliance with the Orthodox Christianity, but got closer to the heterodox view of Christianity, which enabled him to retain his personal religion. He could not accept Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God who redeems human beings from sin and provides salvation as sought for by Christianity as a religion. He did not want redemption from sin but he wanted to be redeemed from the very thought of sin. Gandhi found this interpretation of the Christ, of redemption from sin, to be a constricted one; above all, the assertion of the evangelical Christians of Christianity to be the only religion that provided the way to Salvation did not give certification to his own personal religion. So, when he came in contact with the unorthodox view of Christianity, it delighted him as they helped him value his personal religion. Tidrick has asserted that Gandhi not only remained a convert to the basic doctrine of the Esoteric Christian Union but began to apply them to himself, as a Christ in making.³ Gandhi regarded Jesus Christ as the greatest teacher ever born on earth. He interpreted Jesus Christ as the Son of God, not in the literal sense as the orthodox Christians did, but a spiritual birth made Jesus Christ the son of God for Gandhi. Writing about what

¹ Anandan A. J.,(1998) *God for All, God for Me*, SAIACS Publications, Bangalore, p. 45,82.

² Prabhu, R. K., (ed) (1959) *Gandhi, M.K., What Jesus Means to Me*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, p. 8.

³ Tidrick, Kathryn, (2008) *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life*, I. B. Tauris & Co, New York, p. 45.

‘Jesus means to me’ in *The modern Review*, October 1941, Gandhi explains in his own words why he could not accept Jesus Christ as the only begotten son of God:

To His believers, He was God’s only begotten son... To me it implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation in other words, is that in Jesus’ own life is the key of His nearness to God; that He expressed as no one could the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see him and recognize Him as the son of God.⁴

Writing more about his interpretation of the son of God in his autobiography, years later, in 1924, Gandhi reasoned this out:

If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God, or God himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself.⁵

Gandhi lived his life to be the son of God, to do the will of God and be one with God. So taking the image of the Christ as the example, Gandhi regarded Jesus Christ as a teacher who would guide him, to come closer and be one with the almighty. He examined the life of Jesus Christ and tried to follow in the footsteps of ‘the greatest teacher humanity has ever had’ to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Studying his stay in South Africa, we come across many instances of the influence the Christ and his doctrine had in the making of the life of Gandhi. It was during his two decades stay in South Africa that Gandhi had formulated the ideals which made him the Mahatma. Gandhi was a person who put into practice whatever appealed to him before he preached to others. This is one of the reasons that make him the Mahatma. Gandhi started putting into practice his interpretation of the Christ in his life and he imitated the Christ in his everyday life and his struggles.

⁴Prabhu, R. K., op.cit., p. 8.

⁵ Gandhi, M.K., (2014) *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Rupa Publication, Noida, p.140.

Forgiveness to One's Adversary

The very first instance where we see him portraying Jesus Christ in his life was in Durban. Gandhi had written the pamphlet regarding the condition of the Indians in South Africa while he was in India but the writings of his 'Green Pamphlet' were misinterpreted. A four-line cable from Reuter's London office, accused Gandhi of sullyng the name of the Natal Europeans and he was charged of organizing an agency to flood Natal with Indian immigrants. It so happened that the ss Courland, by which Gandhi family travelled and another ship the ss Naderi, arrived together in Durban harbor at the same time on December 19, 1896. To the Europeans of Natal, already excited by the Reuter's report, the coincidence looked like a conspiracy. The Natal Europeans prevented the landing of the Indians and the ships were placed under quarantine under the pretext of a plague that was spreading in back home in India.⁶ When he was asked what he would do if the Natal Europeans would carry out their threats and how he would stand by his principle of non-violence, Gandhi had already made up his mind to forgive his adversary:

I hope God will give me the courage and the sense to forgive them and to refrain from bringing them to law. I have no anger against them. I am only sorry for their ignorance and their narrowness. I know that they sincerely believe that what they are doing today is right and proper. I have no reason therefore to be angry with them.⁷

Soon after, on January 13, 1897, Gandhi was lynched by young European boys while he was walking home from the Durban harbour. When he was asked to prosecute his attackers, he writes down the reply he gave and recalls this in his autobiography:

⁶ Nanda, B. R. (1958) *Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 45-46.

⁷Gandhi, M.K., op.cit., p. 169.

I do not want to prosecute anyone. It is possible that I may be able to identify one or two of them, but what is the use of getting them punished? Besides, I do not hold the assailants to blame. They were given to understand that I had made exaggerated statements in India about the whites in Natal and calumniated them.⁸

Here, the statement of Gandhi, how ‘he do(es) not hold the assailants to blame’, rings a bell from the utterance of Jesus Christ when he was crucified on the cross: “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do”.⁹ We see Gandhi imitating the Christ by not accusing his assailants as, in the Christ’s view, they were misguided and the doctrine of forgiveness to one’s adversary is clearly reflected in the life of Gandhi.

Till the very end of his life Gandhi followed this mantra and as if foreseeing the image of his death, he says:

...it is my constant prayer that I may never have a feeling of anger against my traducers, that even if I fall a victim to an assassin’s bullet, I may deliver up my soul with the remembrance of me to be written down an imposter if my lips utter a word of anger or abuse against my assailant at the last moment.¹⁰

Gandhi did not only want to live his life like the Christ but he wanted to be like Christ till the very last minute of his death.

Life of Austerity

South Africa had been a laboratory for Gandhi, where the subject being tested was himself, the pursuer of truth. Gandhi kept changing, experiencing a new epiphany every two years or so – Phoenix (1904), Brahmacharya (1906), Satyagraha (1908),

⁸Ibid., p.201.

⁹Holy Bible, New King James Version, Holman Bible Publishers, Tennessee, p.823.

¹⁰Ellsberg, Robert, (1991) *Gandhi on Christianity*, Orbis Books, New York, p. 74.

Tolstoy Farm (1910) – each representing a milestone in the trail he was blazing.¹¹ It was in South Africa that we see Gandhi embraced austerity. Even though he had failed as a lawyer back home, here in South Africa, he had established himself as a lawyer and was earning a good sum of money. What was the reason behind the adaptation of the simple life? Gandhi put into practice whatever appealed to him and the experiment of living a simple life, he did, was in the laboratory of the Phoenix Settlement. This settlement was the product of the overnight reading of the book *Unto this Last* written by John Ruskin, which was handed to him by Henry Polak while travelling to Durban from Johannesburg. After completing the book, Gandhi was determined to change his life in accordance with the ideals of the book. Ruskin was inspired by the parable given by Jesus in Matthew 20: 1-17, about the labourers in the vineyard. The parable talks about how the kingdom of heaven is like the landowner of the vineyard and every worker is rewarded equally, “give unto this, even as unto thee”.¹² Ruskin focused on the moral economy rather than the political economy and that the rich should raise the veil of luxury that has blindfolded their eyes “until the time comes and the kingdom, when Christ’s gift of bread and bequest of peace shall be unto this last as unto thee”.¹³ Gandhi summarized the teachings of *Unto this Last* in three points. Firstly, it was that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. Secondly, that a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s, inasmuch as, all have the same right to earn their livelihood from their work. Thirdly, a life of the labour, that is the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraft, was the life worth

¹¹ Lelyveld, Joseph, (2015) *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, Harper Collins India, Noida, p.19-20.

¹² Holy Bible, op.cit., p.766.

¹³ Chadha, Yogesh, (1997) *Rediscovering Gandhi*, Books Limited, United Kingdom, p.104.

living.¹⁴ It makes us wonder why Gandhi slowly and steadily started living a simple life and embraced the life of austerity. What made Gandhi to consider the life of austerity to be an essential part of his life? The work he had failed to gain at home was finally in his hands; instead he chose to live the life of austerity or non-possession.

Gandhi, when he delivered one of his early lectures on his return to India, at a meeting of the Muir Central College Economic Society, held in Allahabad, on Friday 22nd December 1916, regarded Jesus the greatest economist of his time and gave the example about the rich man from the gospel of Mark as ‘an eternal rule of life’.

Here he quoted Jesus Christ from the gospel:

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God ... Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.¹⁵

Gandhi also pointed out that the greatest teachers of the world like Jesus, Mahomed, Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Shankara, Dayanand, Ramakrishna who influence over and moulded the character of thousands of men were all men who deliberately embraced poverty.¹⁶ It is interesting to note Gandhi’s choice in the pantheon; all were reformers of established religion. This, however, may not be central to the concerns of this thesis. We, however, hold the following here in this context.

Although the reading of John Ruskin made him understand a life that was worth living and he took the steps to the defragmentation of the life he was living and

¹⁴ Gandhi, M.K., op.cit., Noida, p.308.

¹⁵ Prabhu, R. K., op.cit, pp. 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

set up the Phoenix settlement in 1904 as an experiment of living a simple life, we cannot deny the fact that it was also the result of the lessons he took from the greatest teachers of the world. And Jesus being the one of those, he looked to Christ and his doctrine for guidance. One cannot deny this from the way he quotes and takes the example of the parable of the rich man and how hard it is for them to enter the Kingdom of God; Gandhi strived to enter the Kingdom of God or be one with the almighty. Gandhi himself says that, “I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven which is moksha.”¹⁷

Kathryn has asserted that Gandhi entered Politics, not to liberate his country as commonly understood but to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, which is God’s rule on earth, the rule of spirit over flesh.¹⁸ So, Gandhi, as he could not serve both God and mammon, and taking the example of Christ, started living the life of austerity to aid himself to his journey of spiritual revelation and to make this world the Kingdom of God.

Gandhi’s Family

‘Family first’ was not Gandhi’s motto and it was one of the reasons that made him the Mahatma of the people.¹⁹ Gandhi regarded every other person as his family, his brother and sister. Gandhi shared the pains and happiness of the others as his own. The definition of the boundary of the family according to Gandhi extended way beyond his immediate family. Gandhi’s brother Laxmidas had written a long list of complaints to Gandhi of not looking after the economic needs of the family and had

¹⁷ Prabhu, R. K. & Rao, U. R. (ed) M. K. Gandhi, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, p.7.

¹⁸ Tidrick, Kathryn, op.cit., p. 45.

¹⁹ Gandhi, Rajmohan, (2017) *Why Gandhi Still matters*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, p. 2.

asked Gandhi to send hundred rupees a month for the family in India. Gandhi replying to the letter of his brother, expressed what the word family meant to him:

I fail to understand what you mean by the word “family”. To me, the family includes not only the two brothers but sister as well. It also includes our cousins. Indeed, if I could say that my family comprises all living beings: the only difference being that those who are more dependent on me, because of blood relation or any other circumstances get more help from me.²⁰

Gandhi’s letter to his brother makes us relate his approach to that of the Christ, how in the similar way, Christ too had replied while his mother and brothers were waiting to meet and speak with him, which is recorded in the gospel of Matthew 12: 48-49, which reads:

Who is My mother and and who are My brothers?” And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.²¹

Here we see Gandhi taking the lesson from the teacher and extending his family circle to all the living beings. Gandhi when once asked about his family replied: “All of India is my family”.²² He dedicated his whole life for his family which included India and the whole world. In Durban, as well as in Johannesburg, he had already opened up the meaning of family in his home, where his work mates, clerks and junior counsel and his friends, whether Indian or European or Jewish stayed together with his family in complete harmony and was treated as the member of his family.²³

²⁰ Guha,Ramachandra, (2014) *Gandhi Before India*, Penguin Books, Gurgaon, p.236.

²¹ Holy Bible, op.cit., p.759.

²² Fisher, Louis, *The life of Mahatma Gandhi* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2016), p.164.

²³Nanda, B. R., op.cit., p. 27.

Celibacy

Another important step he took in South Africa was the vow of *Brahamacharya* or Celibacy, in 1906, on which he had been reflecting for some time. Indian tradition honoured such a person and so did Christianity in Gandhi's view. He thought that celibacy would make him more effective in his future struggles.²⁴ Gandhi's vow of celibacy was the most crucial point in his life, without which he could not have been able to practice the two other principles of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*. Although there were practical reasons for the vow, Kasturbai was in bad health and another pregnancy might have endangered her life, and he did not want any more children; but the overriding reason was spiritual.²⁵ Gandhi writes, 'The full and correct meaning of *Brahamacharya* is search for the Brahma'. *Brahamacharya* for Gandhi was control in thought, speech and action of all senses, at all places and at all times. The man or woman who observes such perfect *brahmacharya* is totally free from disease and therefore, he or she lives ever in the presence of God, is like God.²⁶

Gandhi wanted to observe *brahmacharya* in thought, word and deed, with a view to realizing God.²⁷ He strived throughout his life to perfect his *brahmacharya*, which was for him an essential step to the realization of God by putting out the rule of flesh in the body and perfection of the spirit. Christ has elucidated that everybody cannot accept celibacy and it was only for those it has been given too. Gandhi became a 'eunuch who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake'.²⁸ The book of first letter to the Corinthians by Apostle Paul was among Gandhi's favourite

²⁴ Gandhi, Rajmohan, op.cit., p. 46.

²⁵ Mehta, Ved, (1976) *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, p. 134.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 206.

²⁷ Gandhi, M.K., op.cit., Noida, p.325.

²⁸ Holy Bible, op.cit., p. 765.

texts.²⁹ Apostle Paul writes how the married men should live as they have no wife as he who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord and how he may please the Lord but he who is married cares about the things of the world and how he may please his wife.³⁰ These words seem to have inspired Gandhi to lead a life of Celibacy which would aid him in his realization of God.

Fasting

Gandhi knew about fasting from his childhood days, he had seen his mother fasting day and night but he got to know the real meaning of fast from the Christ. Fasting for Gandhi was a means of self-restraint. With the hope of supporting his *brahmacharya* vow, he began keeping *Ekadashi* fast.³¹ Gandhi opines that a genuine fast cleansed the body, mind and soul. It crucified the flesh and set the soul free from the bondage of flesh. He believed that the strength of the soul grows in proportion as one subdued the flesh and it was not possible to see God face to face unless one crucified the flesh.³²

For Gandhi the life of austerities, fasting and prayers represented the yearnings of his soul striving to lay his weary head in the lap of his Maker.³³ Gandhi used fasting as a tool to suppress the evils of the flesh and strengthen the spirit to be one with the Brahma. Gandhi seems to have taken the example of the forty day fast of Jesus Christ and his victory against the temptation of Satan. This provided for Gandhi an example of the power of the fast and the strength gained that helps to overcome the evil forces.

²⁹Gandhi, Rajmohan, op.cit., p. 57.

³⁰Holy Bible, op.cit., p. 890.

³¹Gandhi, M. K, op.cit., pp.340-341.

³²Prabhu, R. K. & Rao, U. R., op.cit., pp. 35-36.

³³Ellsberg, Robert, (1991) *Gandhi on Christianity*, Orbis Books, New York, p. 25.

Sermon on the Mount

Gandhi, in an address at the YMCA in Colombo, Ceylon, in 1927, clarified that if he had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and his own interpretation of it, he would not hesitate to say “Oh, yes, I am a Christian...”. The Sermon on the Mount was for Gandhi, the whole of the teachings of the Christ. Fisher has pointed out that even though the verses from Matthew 5: 39:40 were the verses that delighted him beyond measure when he first read the Bible, other verses from the Sermon too ‘struck a sympathetic chord in the Mahatma-to-be’.³⁴

Some of the verses from the Sermon make us see how Gandhi applied it in his life to be one with God. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”, Gandhi strived all his life for purity of the heart, whether through *brahmacharya* or fasting as a tool to achieve a pure heart. He always talked about the importance of the inner change that was necessary in the life of a man. Another verse that overwhelmed Gandhi from the Sermon was: “blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God”;³⁵ Gandhi, all his life acted as the peacemaker between two communities whether it was between the Hindus and the Muslims or the rulers and the ruled. Other verses like “whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven...agree with thine adversary quickly...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart...ye resist not evil...love your enemies bless them that curse you...Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth”;³⁶ these help us connect Gandhi with the Christ

³⁴ Fisher, Louis, *The life of Mahatma Gandhi* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2016), pp.53, 417.

³⁵ Holy Bible, op.cit., p. 751.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 751-753.

even more. Gandhi read the sermon, quoted the sermon and followed the sermon, in his quest for spiritual realization.

Self-suffering

In Rome, Gandhi walked through the Vatican galleries; in the Sistine Chapel, he was spell-bound, 'I saw a figure of Christ there. It was wonderful. I could not tear myself away. The tears sprang to my eyes as I gazed'.³⁷ Though Gandhi never claimed to be a Christian, the example of the Jesus' suffering on the cross was at the root of his faith in nonviolence. For him, the suffering of Jesus so defined the law of love, that love and suffering were seen as one and the same. For Gandhi "living Christ means a living Cross; without it life is a living death";³⁸ the cross became the symbol by which he too lived his life for the people. He laid his life as an example to the people to read and to learn. Inspired by the sacrifice of the Christ, he too sacrificed his life for the freedom of the people. Although for Gandhi the Cross was "the symbol of the theocentric rather than the christicentric life".³⁹ "The Cross was a magnet for Gandhi"⁴⁰ which pulled him with its inward force to the self-sacrifice of the Christ for the people.

Gandhi's public fasting was a form of self-suffering taken from the Christ, who gave his life for the sins of the man as he loved them with an immeasurable love. Hindu ascetics had always observed fasts for self-purification. We see Gandhi fasted for the very first time for the purification of others, other than for his own self-purification, when he found out that a boy and a girl of Pheonix settlement had moral

³⁷Nanda, B. R., op.cit., p. 180.

³⁸Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., p. 105.

³⁹Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁰Gandhi, Rajmohan, op.cit., p. 59.

fall by being in a pre-marital relation. Gandhi fasted for seven days as a penance for their moral lapse and again for fourteen days when they repeated the offence. Ved Mehta opines that Gandhi started believing that there was no boundary between public and private morality in society, he concluded that he could expiate the sins of others by taking them on himself.⁴¹ Fasting for the purification of the other person is very new and unknown to the fasting found in Hinduism. This fasting seems more similar to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world.

Gandhi fasted for three days, for the very first time, for the public cause and it was in the course of the Ahmadabad Mill strike in 1917. Since then, he used the weapon of public fasting seventeen times in his life.⁴² Gandhi's public fast was to:

...exercise a moral pressure, but the pressure was directed not against those disagreed with him but against those who loved him and believed in him; he sought to prick the conscience of the latter and to convey to them something of his own inner anguish at a monstrous tyranny. He did not expect his critics to react in the same way as his friends and co-workers, but if his self-crifixion could demonstrate his sincerity to them, the battle would be more than half-won.⁴³

Gandhi learnt from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ that self-suffering could change the heart of his loved ones and his adversaries. So he took public fasting as a tool to change the heart of his loved ones. The Bishop of Madras, seeing the self-suffering of Gandhi, remarked in December 1913: "I frankly confess though it pains me to say it, that I see in Mr. Gandhi, the patient sufferer for the cause of righteousness and mercy, a truer representative of the Crucified Saviour, than the men who have thrown him in prison and yet call themselves by the name of Christ."⁴⁴

⁴¹Mehta, Ved, op.cit., p. 141.

⁴²Ibid., p. 156.

⁴³Nanda, B. R., op.cit., p. 190.

⁴⁴Guha, Ramachandra, op.cit., p. 491.

Voice of Conscience

‘Truth was God’ for Gandhi and his experiments with Truth were to be one with God. The answer to the question as to what is truth, Gandhi says, he solved it himself and it was what the voice within tells you to do. For him the voice of God, of Conscience, of Truth, or the Inner Voice or ‘the still small Voice’ means one and the same thing.⁴⁵ Gandhi mentions how he followed this still small voice or voice of conscience when he went for his many public fasts and even the start of the major political movements. Gandhi always followed the guidance of this ‘still small voice’. This is similar to the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit who guides the people in their everyday life.

Living Christ: Conclusion

What Gandhi had been striving and pining to achieve all his life was to see God face to face, and to attain *moksha*, for which he lived and moved and have his being in pursuit of this goal. Gandhi started living Christ for the achievement of this goal in South Africa. He took the Christ as an example, a teacher and a guide to fulfill his dream to be one with God. Gandhi thought that the gentle figure of Christ, so patient, so kind, so loving, so full of forgiveness that he taught his followers not to retaliate when abused or struck, but to turn the other cheek, was a beautiful example of the perfect man. He reveals that he was tremendously attracted to Christianity, but eventually I came to the conclusion that to be a good Hindu also meant I would be a good Christian. There was no need for him to join the creed of Christianity to be a believer in the beauty of the teachings of Jesus or to try to follow his example.⁴⁶ Gandhi opines, “Could the fact that I do not accept this belief (orthodox

⁴⁵Prabhu, R. K. & Rao, U. R., op.cit., pp. 42, 33.

⁴⁶Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., New York, p. 12.

view of the Christ) make Jesus have more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of his teachings and of His doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so.”⁴⁷

Gandhi believes that even though he does not believe the orthodox interpretation of the Christ, the influence Jesus Christ has in his life will not increase or decrease. He admits himself the influence the Christ had in his life.

Gandhi never came in equal footing with the orthodox interpretation of the Christ as he always “applied acid test of reason to every religion”.⁴⁸ Later, the influence of his close associates in South Africa, Henry Polak and Herman Kallenbach, further gave a stamp to his heterodox interpretation of the Christ. They were Jews and Judaism does not consider Jesus Christ to be the Messiah. Out of Gandhi’s four closest friends in South Africa, three were Jews⁴⁹ and Hermann Kallenbach, was the closest person Gandhi had in South Africa during the period when he took the first step towards Mahatma. Ramachandra Guha opines that Gandhi was not really influenced by Jewish thought,⁵⁰ but looking at the relation Gandhi had with Kallenbach, who were known as ‘soulmates’, makes us know that the Jewish thought or the Old testament too had an influence in Gandhi’s thought.

Gandhi carved out the path for himself by taking his interpretation of the doctrine from different religious teachings to carry out his own spiritual path. He considered that all religions held the truth as ‘Truth was God’ for him and selected doctrines from them with ‘the acid test of reason’ and applied it in his life as it

⁴⁷Prabhu, R. K., op.cit., p. 8.

⁴⁸ Nanda, B. R., op.cit., pp. 265, 55.

⁴⁹Guha, Ramachandra, op.cit., p. 165.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 531.

appealed to him. It may be held that Gandhi, implementing Christ in his life with his own interpretation and his life, gives out the aroma of Christ.

CHAPTER III

IMPACT OF THE CHRIST ON GANDHI'S PROGRAMS

The previous chapter examined how Gandhi experimented with living the Christ and how his life started giving out the essence of Jesus Christ. Seeing his life, Gandhi's biographers and his contemporaries, could not refrain themselves from comparing him with the Christ. The days Gandhi lived as Mahatma and his death has been seen as a parallel with the life and death of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was for Gandhi, son of God not in a literal sense but as someone who was nearest to God and followed God's will. So Gandhi tried to follow the example of Jesus Christ who was nearest to God, to fulfill his ultimate aim of seeing God face to face and to attain *Moksha*. Gandhi himself has made it unambiguously clear, by writing down in the introduction to his autobiography dated 26th November 1925, that the achievement that he has been striving and pining for was self-realization, to see God face to face and to attain *Moksha* (salvation) and he was living each day in the pursuit of this Goal. He goes on to say that all his speaking and writing and even his venture into the political field was directed towards the same end.¹

Gandhi was a person who applied whatever appealed to him in his life first and after it was tested, he preached the message to the world. He gave to the world his life as a message to learn and follow and to attain *Moksha*. Gandhi did not only look for his personal salvation but he wanted the people to follow him to the way to salvation. The influences Jesus Christ had in the life of Gandhi could now also be seen in his political and social reformatory programs. This chapter will look into the

¹ Gandhi, M.K., (2014) *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Rupa Publication, Noida, p.xvi.

footprints of the Christ on Gandhi's political and social constructive programs which rendered him as the Mahatma to the people.

It was Gandhi's experiences in South Africa which made him the Mahatma; we can see this in the words of Nelson Mandela who inherited Gandhi's legacy in many ways, where he says: "You gave us Mohandas Gandhi; we returned him to you as Mahatma Gandhi."² It was also here, in South Africa, where we find his thoughts to be molded into whatever later came to be known as Gandhism. In South Africa, he had formulated his social and political thought and successfully tried and tested Satyagraha as a political weapon and South Africa was indeed the laboratory. It is in South Africa that we see his transformation from Mohandas to Mahatma Gandhi.

The great soul he acquired was because of his faith in God and his search for the realization of the eternal truth, which we often miss to ponder upon while reading Gandhi. As Ramu Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, has rightly pointed out, we cannot secularize Gandhi. If we take the Mahatma's faith out of him, then Gandhi would not be the Mahatma. His religious beliefs were central to his political and social philosophy.³ A large part of the study on Gandhi tends to overlook Gandhi's attitude to religion, which in reality holds the key to understand his life and thought. Hence, to comprehend the Mahatma, we need to look at his religiousness that shaped his attitude and this alone will give us the key to open up the mystery of his life. The religious Gandhi, his aims and aspirations, was an integral part of the Mahatma and much closer to the Mahatma than the political Gandhi. It was in South Africa where

²Kulkarni, Sudheendra. "Thank you South Africa." <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/thank-you-south-africa/> (accessed 10 4, 2016).

³ Cited by Guha, Ramachandra. "His Faith, Our Faith." *Hindustan Times*. 1 29, 2008. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/his-faith-our-faith/story-sdpOimN69y2gTuSJs1Sltl.html> (accessed 10 1, 2016).

the religious Gandhi and the Political Gandhi converged to make Gandhi the Mahatma of the people.

Political Programs

Mahatma Gandhi is basically known for his political programs and mainly for the formulation of the weapon of Satyagraha, which was successful not only in bringing political freedom to India but also to other nations. The experiences he had in South Africa led to the creation of the creed of Satyagraha. Gandhi experimented himself in the laboratory of South Africa, where he kept changing and experiencing a new epiphany every two years, which added to the making of the man he came to be known. Satyagraha as a means of active struggle to achieve a national goal was the only thing that he carried in his meager baggage when he left South Africa to India in 1916.⁴

Gandhi had gone to South Africa to help in the legal matters of an ex-patriate Gujarati businessman, Dada Abdulla; but on the night before his departure, which he had planned after his stint as attorney was over, he decided to stay on there and help the African Indians with their political rights. His stay, then, eventually extended into two eventful decades and the days he spent there fighting with the Indians for their rights, was the “great rehearsal”⁵ of the play, he was to perform back home in the 32 years of the rest of his life in India. During the two decades he was in South Africa, he helped in the establishment of a permanent Indian political organization to fight for the rights of Indians and to act as a moral and social force for the reform of the Indian

⁴Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*. Noida: Harper Collins India, 2015, p. 27.

⁵ibid., p. 16.

community, and called it the Natal Indian Congress, named after the Indian National Congress, which was then agitating in India for similar causes since 1885.⁶

By 1906, Gandhi was already deeply involved in the struggle of the Indians in South Africa to overturn the laws that discriminated against them. He, and many others, had taken a vow that they would not submit to the unjust laws. The term “passive resistance” was current. Gandhi knew that historically, the English people, when a minority did not approve of some offensive piece of legislation, frequently used a form of passive resistance as an alternative to armed rebellion.⁷

Gandhi’s *satyagraha* was initially termed as passive resistance and the first instance of this, in 1906, was with a call for defiance of a new piece of anti-Indian legislation in the Transvaal called the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance. Gandhi lambasted it as the “Black Act”. It required Indians to register in Transvaal, for the rights of residence, which they thought they already possessed as British Indians; as British law having been imposed on the territory as a consequence of recently concluded war. Under this discriminatory act, registration required fingerprinting of all ten fingers of every man, women and children over the age of eight and the certificates thus obtained had to be produced when asked.⁸

Gandhi began to see that the term “passive resistance” did not adequately express their movement. He did not like the adjective “passive” which seemed to connote weakness. He held a contest in the Indian Opinion a newspaper he was thus editing, to come up with the right name that reflected their struggle. His nephew

⁶ Mehta, Ved, (1976) *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, pp. 119-120.

⁷ Rynne, Terrence J., (2008) *Gandhi and Jesus The saving power of Nonviolence*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, p. 38.

⁸ Lelyveld, Joseph, op.cit., 2015, p. 16.

Maganlal Gandhi suggested *Sadagraha* meaning “firmness in the cause”. Gandhi, to make the Indian Movement clearer, changed it to *Satyagraha*, translated as the “truth force” or more literally as “firmness in truth” or “clinging to truth”.⁹

Satyagraha was Gandhi’s “most important experiment in South Africa”.¹⁰ In 1908, when the first biographer of Gandhi questioned him about the genesis of *Satyagraha*, Gandhi asserts that it was not *Bhagavad Gita* but the New Testament which really awakened in him the righteousness and the value of Passive resistance.¹¹ Gandhi characterized Satyagraha as a *dharmayuddha* where God himself plans campaigns and conducts battles. Gandhi brings out the basic *tenets* of Satyagraha that is truth, non-violence and self-suffering in the publication that he edited, *Young India*, dated 30th October 1936:

In the application of *Satyagraha*, I discovered in the earliest stages, that pursuit of Truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one’s opponent, but that he must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy. For what appears to be truth to the one may appear to be error to the other. And patience means self-suffering. So the doctrine came to mean vindication of Truth, not by infliction suffering on the opponent but one’s own self.¹²

Looking at the qualifications of the *Satyagrahi* that Gandhi laid out in yet another of his publication, the *Harijan*, dated 1st July 1939; here he also stresses the foundation on which Satyagraha stood:

He (satyagrahi) must have a living faith in God, for He is his only Rock. He must believe in truth and non-violence as his creed and therefore have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature which he expects to evoke by his and love expressed through his suffering.¹³

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁰ Gandhi, M.K., *op.cit.*, p.34.

¹¹ Nanda, B. R. (1958) *Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 66-67.

¹² Prabhu, R. K. & Rao, U. R. (ed) M. K. Gandhi, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, p.167.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.171.

His political thoughts have been greatly influenced by the life of Jesus Christ and The Holy Bible. Truth, non-violence and self-suffering, the major principles of *Satyagraha* were inspired by the life of the Christ. He saw all of these in the life of Jesus and he called the Christ the “Prince of Satyagrahis”.¹⁴

Ahimsa was a cardinal virtue of Hinduism through the centuries. Gandhi, under the influence especially of Tolstoy and the Sermon on the Mount, made it the centerpiece of his thought and praxis and *sine qua non* in the pursuit of human liberation. Even though it is not literally included in the word *satyagraha*, it is essential to the practice of *satyagraha*.¹⁵ When he read the Bible for the first time, the verse from the Sermon on the Mount, “But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also,” had delighted him beyond measure.¹⁶ His belief in *Ahimsa* became more grounded when he read Leo Tolstoy’s book *Kingdom of God is Within You*. In this book, Tolstoy has inveighed against the Russian Orthodox Church as a worldly force whose aim was to crush Christ, and against civilization, which was based on violence, since governments were kept in power by huge standing armies. Tolstoy taught that man’s highest duty was to love his fellow-man and resist evil and violence – to live like Christ.¹⁷

As Raghavab Iyer noted, Gandhi’s early hesitation towards non-violence was overcome by reading Tolstoy’s *Kingdom of God is Within You*. Gandhi thought

¹⁴Nanda, B. R., (1995) “Gandhi and Religion”, In Mahatma Gandhi 125 years by B.R. Nanda, New Age International Publishers Limited, New Delhi, p. 130.

¹⁵Rynne, Terrence J., op.cit., p. 53.

¹⁶Gandhi, M.K., op.cit., p. 71.

¹⁷ Mehta, Ved, op.cit, pp. 140-141.

Tolstoy's remarkable development of the doctrine of nonviolence puts to shame the narrow and lopsided interpretations put upon it by its votaries in India despite the great discoveries in the field of Ahimsa made by ancient Indian sages.¹⁸ Gandhi writes what Jesus Christ was for him in the *Harijan* dated 30th June 1946:

And he (Jesus) has been acclaimed in the West as the prince of passive resisters. I showed years ago in South Africa that the adjective 'passive' was a misnomer, at least as applied to Jesus. He was the most active resister known perhaps to history. His was non-violence par excellence.¹⁹

Gandhi saw in the life of Jesus Christ the working of non-violence and wrote in *Harijan* dated 28th April 1946 that,

But this is the real test of Ahimsa. ... He who when being kicked bears no anger against his murderer and even asks God to forgive him is truly non-violent. History relates this of Jesus. With His dying breath on his Cross he is reported to have said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."²⁰

Martin Luther King, Jr., in his leadership of the black freedom movement in the American South saw 'the Christian Doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of non-violence as one of the most potent weapons available to the oppressed people in their struggle for freedom'.²¹

Self-suffering another major aspect of *Satyagraha*, was also taken from the life of the Christ. Rather than taking advantage of the adversary's weakness, the *Satyagrahi* was to follow the path of self-suffering to change the heart of the enemy. He interpreted Christ on the cross as self-suffering that was needed to change the heart of the people. Gandhi writes:

¹⁸Cited by Rynne, Terrence J., op.cit., p. 29.

¹⁹Prabhu, R. K., op.cit., p.16.

²⁰Ibid., p.16.

²¹Ellsberg, Robert, (1991) *Gandhi on Christianity*, Orbis Books, New York, p. x.

Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal.²²

The power of self-suffering and the movement of satyagraha can be seen in the words of one of the secretaries of General Smuts in a letter to Gandhi:

I often wish you took to violence like the English strikers and then it we would know at once how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone and never transgress your self-imposed limits of courtesy and chivalry. And that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness.²³

Jesus Christ, for Gandhi, was a prince among politicians and Jesus Christ did render unto Caesar (a title of Roman emperors) that which was Caesar's and gave the devil his due. He never shunned him and is reported, never once, to have yielded to his incantations. The politics of the Christ's time consisted in securing the welfare of the people by teaching them not to be seduced by the trinkets of the priests and the Pharisees.²⁴ Gandhi's life and his work was so synonymous to Jesus Christ that his journey to Dandi was compared, by his disciples and followers, to Jesus's journey to Jerusalem; many Hindus, who could read, bought copies of the Bible and read it. Gandhi himself thought according to one scholar that he might have to die in Dandi, as Jesus died in Jerusalem.²⁵

Gandhi points out that the last message he gives to India, was that she will find her salvation through non-violence and through non-violence alone India will contribute to the salvation of the world.²⁶ Gandhi did not only strive for his personal

²²Prabhu, R. K., op.cit., p.5.

²³ Mehta, Ved, op.cit., p. 147.

²⁴Prabhu, R. K., op.cit., p. 17.

²⁵ Mehta, Ved, op.cit., p. 167-168.

²⁶ Nanda, B. R. (1958) op.cit, p. 106.

salvation but wanted the whole of the humanity to follow him towards salvation and identified the path towards it. He simply and humbly followed in the footsteps of his great teacher towards the realization of his ultimate aim, to see God face to face. His involvement in politics and the political programs that he proposed and led was for the fulfillment of his aim to attain *moksha*. *Satyagraha* was not a policy, but a creed that he introduced which led one to *Moksha*. Gandhi lived all his life to be a *satyagrahi* and gave his life as an example for the people to emulate.

Social Reformative Programs

Mahatma Gandhi's name has always been resonated and brought into the limelight as the political Gandhi. It is certainly not incorrect; as Gandhi's work started with political concerns and the rights of the people. But Gandhi was not doing politics all his life. Politics was not his primary concern. On a number of occasions, he claimed, that his work of social reform was in no way subordinate to political work and to a certain extent as his social work would be impossible without the help of political work; he took to the latter and only to the extent that it helped the former. He also tells us that the work of social reform or self-purification of this nature is a hundred times dearer to him than what is called purely political work.²⁷

Mahatma Gandhi gave himself, till the very last day of his life, in the struggle for the construction of a healthier society. He spoke up against the evils of Hinduism. He worked towards the abolition of untouchability and child marriage that was prevalent in Hinduism. He toured the country and fasted for the upliftment of the lives and the condition of the Harijans, the name he gave to the untouchables. He worked

²⁷Nigam, Aditya, (2009) *The 'Angel of History': Reading 'Hind Swaraj' Today*, Economic and Political Weekly 44, no. 11, p. 1.

towards the reconciliation of the two main religious communities, Hindus and Muslims. From his very first national involvement in the freedom struggle to the days in and after the freedom of India, Gandhi was working towards his goal of bringing them together. He started the *charkha* spinning movement to help the poorer sections of the society to save them from poverty; and the constructive program was driven to the boycott of British goods. He worked towards the building of a society which is ruled by equality, justice and welfare of all human beings, economic and social development of the society and the country; or *sarvodaya* as he called it.

What was the reason behind his primary concern for social welfare? His services to society were the step towards his ultimate aim, in his life, that is to see God face to face and attain *moksha*. Gandhi himself says that: “I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven which is *moksha*.” His ultimate aim, in his life, was to attain *moksha* or to free himself from the bondage of the flesh. He did not see it necessary for him that to achieve salvation, he had to seek the shelter of the cave but he saw the road to salvation through the service of his country and its people. Service to humanity was the way through which he wanted to achieve *moksha*.²⁸ Gandhi makes it clear about his service of God through the service of humanity:

I am endeavouring to see God through service of Humanity, for I know that God is neither in Heaven, nor down below, but in everyone.

I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of the humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan Cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find him apart from Humanity.²⁹

²⁸ Prabhu, R. K. & Rao, U. R. (ed) op.cit., p.7.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

J.T.F. Jordens points out that when Gandhi declared that service was the activity that leads to the realization of *moksha*, he made a statement, nowhere to be found in the Hindu tradition.³⁰ So, from where did he come to learn about the concept of service of humanity will lead to the service of God, which led one to the realization of the *moksha*. This concept of service of humanity is a Christian concept and more particularly in the Catholic religion after the counter-reformation.

Mid of the 16th century saw the response to Protestantism and to the problems it sought to address; the Catholic renewal or Counter-Reformation became a reality. One of the results was the establishment of the Society of Jesus, founded by the Spanish Basque Ignatius of Loyala. The work of the Jesuits in defending the faith must be looked at in the context of the Counter-Reformation.

On October 31, 1517, an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther nailed his famous Ninety-five Theses to the door of the cathedral in Wittenburg, Germany. This single action has traditionally been viewed as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. For Luther, salvation comes to human beings from God through faith alone. Good works do not make people good, but once people have been justified by God they do good works. Luther also opposed the buying and selling of indulgences, a practice quite rampant in Western Europe of his day. The Church had always taught that an indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, and Luther correctly pointed out that such forgiveness cannot be purchased.

While justification and indulgences are the issues for which Luther is best remembered, many more grievances comprised his Wittenburg list. He also rejected what appeared to him as a means, a claim on the human side to deserve salvation: the

³⁰Cited by Rynne, Terrence J., op.cit., p. 31.

cult of the saints, indulgences, religious vows, those sacraments, which he could not find attested in the New Testament.

The Reformation was, to be sure, no isolated event, but a series of movements in several European countries that in varying ways departed from Catholicism. With the influence of Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, reformed churches were established in Switzerland. These congregations established vernacular liturgies, in contrast to the Latin liturgy of the Catholic Church. They also removed statues of the saints, secularized convents, and followed other practices emerging in neighboring Germany. The French layman, John Calvin brought a non-clerical background to Reformation theology and represented a younger generation of reformers. Calvin focused on the sovereign nature of God. His unique brand of theology was gradually adopted by religious groups identified as Presbyterians, Huguenots, Puritans, and Congregationalists. The times called for a spirited defense of faith; it was the time for Catholic renewal; the Church had been weakened from within by the laxity of her own; she had been weakened from without by the strong theological dissent of the various reformers.

The Catholic Church had to respond adequately, and the Jesuits found themselves part of this response.³¹ The Jesuits worked in building the counter attack on the spread of the reformation movement, which they considered to be heretical. Their main goal was the spreading of Catholic faith which they planned it do through missionary and education work. With the vision of their founder to "find God in all things", they sought to reach out to the whole world. Faith, justice and solidarity with

³¹Connor, Fr. Charles P., *The Counter-Reformation: Ignatius and the Jesuits*, http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2005/cconnor_ignatius_aug05.asp (accessed on 6th November,2017)

the poor and the excluded were central elements of the Jesuit mission of reconciliation.

The Jesuits' work for reconciliation is three-fold: with God, with humanity and with creation. All three are truly one work of God, interconnected and inseparable. Their ministries extend across a world of human need — from parishes to prisons, from retreat centers to refugee resettlements, from schools to hospitals. Jesuits take three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, plus a fourth vow of obedience to the pope in regard to worldwide mission.³² The Jesuits aided their missionary work with their humanitarian work towards the down trodden of the society and providing help to those in need. They found service to humanity was the service to God. To serve God, in the best way as possible and find the presence of God in their lives, the Jesuits reached out to humanity and tried to follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ as he washed the feet of his disciples.

Joseph Lelyveld, in his biography of Gandhi's South African days, opines that Gandhi's engagement with the British and American Missionaries helped insinuate a notion of social equality into Indian thought.³³ A.J. Anandan also states that the zeal and sincerity of Christian missionaries taught him to reorder the Hindu way of life to take care of the poor, the sick and the so-called untouchables.³⁴ The influence of Christian missionaries and their humanitarian work had had a great influence in the formulation of the social thought of Gandhi. Gandhi, however, could never come to terms and reconcile with the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries even

³² Mission and Ministeries, <http://jesuits.org/aboutus?PAGE=DTN-20130520122853> (accessed on 6th November, 2017)

³³ Lelyveld, Joseph, op.cit., p. 36.

³⁴ Anandan A. J., (1998) *God for All, God for Me*, SAIACS Publications, Bangalore, p. 82.

when he was in South Africa and after his return home in India. He found ‘Christianity synonymous with denationalization and Europeanization’.³⁵ Gandhi gives out his view on Christianity in Young India dated March 21, 1929,

Unfortunately, Christianity in India has been inextricably mixed up for the last one hundred and fifty years with the British rule. It appears to us as synonymous with materialistic civilization and imperialistic exploitation by the stronger white races of the weaker races of the world. Its contribution to India has been, therefore, largely of a negative character.³⁶

Even though Gandhi found western Christianity to be a negation of Christ’s Christianity, he felt grateful towards the work the missionaries had done and were doing but advised them that they can serve the spirit of Christianity better by dropping the goal of proselytizing while continuing their philanthropic work. He made the suggestion not as a biased Hindu, but as a humble and impartial student of religion with great leanings towards Christianity.³⁷ When asked how the missionaries could best serve the Indian masses, Gandhi replied, ‘Copy Charlie Andrews’.

Andrews in particular became Gandhi’s model of Christian ministry, who never preached and talked about conversion but lived his life for God and service of humanity. Gandhi openly disregarded the conversion activities of the missionaries but he took the example of their service to humanity towards the service of God and incorporated it into his social constructive programs. Service to humanity was the backbone where all his humanitarian social work stood were conceived and carried out.

³⁵Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., p. 42.

³⁶Ibid., p. 44.

³⁷Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., p. 32.

Reaching God through service was further developed with the growth of his relationship with Tolstoy who was one of the modern men who greatly shaped the life of Gandhi. When he read Tolstoy's book *The Kingdom of God is within You* for the first time, it impressed him beyond measure. The idea that Gandhi received from Tolstoy was the idea of service. Tolstoy's concluding paragraph of *The Kingdom of God is within You* reads, "The only meaning of man's life consists in serving the world by cooperating in the establishment of the kingdom of God". The theme of service pervades the book. Another work of Tolstoy, read by Gandhi, *The Gospel in belief*, also brings out the same theme: "My teaching is that life is given to man not that others may serve him, but that he should give his whole life to service of others".³⁸ Reading Tolstoy made it clearer to Gandhi of the need for service to humanity to attain his goal.

Ignatius Jesudasan brings out how Gandhi drew from Christianity to transform Hinduism in at least three significant ways. First, he realized the Christic presence of God in the poor and the untouchables, initiating actions to break down the barriers that surrounded them and bring them back to the Hindu fold. Second, influenced by Christian thinking, he reinterpreted *karma* as a social and communal expression of sin and salvation rather than an isolated, individualized relationship with God. Third, he saw the necessity of the cross or suffering love (ahimsa) for the God-realization of all people. In each instance, Gandhi saw social and political liberation as the manifestation of these specifically Christian contributions to his transformation of Hinduism.³⁹

³⁸Rynne, Terrence J., op.cit., p. 30.

³⁹Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., p. 99.

All the social reformatory work and to make the world a much better place to live, that Gandhi worked for, was to the realization of his ultimate aim of seeing God face to face or to attain *moksha* or the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. He believed that for the Kingdom of God he needs to work towards it:

My experience tells me that the Kingdom of God is within us, and that we can realize it not by saying, "Lord, Lord" but by doing his will and his work. If therefore, we wait for the Kingdom of God to come as something coming from outside, we shall be surely mistaken.⁴⁰

Gandhi worked towards the building of the Kingdom of God. Gandhi did not believe that Kingdom of God could be built on earth without the grace of God transforming Humans. But he believed that transformation enabled humans to build the Kingdom even in the teeth of non-violence. Service to others and nonviolent resistance to evil, not self-congratulations or merely individual *moksha*, that was building the Kingdom. K.L. Seshagiri explains the kingdom of God that Gandhi wanted to build,

On the social side, the Kingdom of God meant to Gandhi the ideal society in which justice is done...and institutions are geared to encourage the best in men and women. He believed that those institutions which permitted injustice, inequality and exploitation of man by men were evil and the needed to change.⁴¹

Gandhi's goal of founding a nonviolent society was much closer to the Christian idea of the Kingdom than the Hindu idea of *moksha*.⁴² Kathryn Tidrick too has opined that Gandhi entered politics, not to liberate his country in the sense understood by other Indian leaders and the western public which followed his career with such fascinated attention, but to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth or

⁴⁰Rynne, Terrence J., op.cit., p. 25.

⁴¹Cited by Ibid., p. 26.

⁴²Ibid.,p. 26.

Ramarajya he sometimes called it to be. *Ramarajya* is customarily understood in India as a golden age, but understood literally by Gandhi as God's rule on earth, the rule of spirit over flesh.⁴³

He became the "Christ of the untouchables, stripped to a loincloth, as he washed the feet of his disciples".⁴⁴ The Christian concept of service to one's fellow humans was a guiding principle in the life of Gandhi. Gandhi's search through *satyagraha* was not for his own salvation, but for communal growth in truth, involving whole races and peoples converging in mutual recognition and love. The concrete way in which Gandhi suffered towards this community of seeking men is the point at which his experiments coincide most perfectly with the life and death of the Christ.⁴⁵

Thus, in conclusion, Christology can be seen from two points of view- as description or as prescription. For Gandhi, the descriptive aspect, which takes the form of worship and dogma, is subservient to the prescriptive aspect, which consists of imitation of Christ and moral identification with him as manifesting the underlying truth of the spiritual unity of all humankind. Gandhi saw Christ as an ideal *satyagrahi*.⁴⁶ He too strived all his life to be a *satyagrahi* and gave his life as an example to the world to follow him towards the realization of *Moksha* or to see God face to face. He imitated the Christ towards the accomplishment of his dream and people saw his life running parallel with the life and death of Christ. His life used to echo the Christ and he has been linked with the Christ in occasions innumerable.

⁴³ Tidrick, Kathryn, (2008) *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life*, I. B. Tauris & Co, New York, p. xi.

⁴⁴ Ellsberg, Robert, op.cit., p. xvii.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

Gandhi made religious faith an ally and an instrument in the social and political liberation of human beings. Social and political liberation were correlatives to spiritual liberation.⁴⁷ Gandhi's ultimate aim and the message he wanted to give to the world was to bring India and the world towards the spiritual realization. Gandhi's venture into the politics and social fields were the steps through which he wanted to clean the evils and lead the people towards *Moksha*. As Gandhi found Jesus Christ closest to God and one who followed the will of God. He took Jesus Christ as an example to fulfill his ultimate aim to attain moksha and he did not only look after his own salvation but for him salvation of India went hand in hand with that of his own. So he took to political and social programs to include every human being.

The religious Gandhi which made Gandhi the mahatma of the people was the foundation on which both the political Gandhi and the social Gandhi stood firm. Following the example of Jesus Christ, the teacher he looked up to, in his political and social constructive works, we can see the prints of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in Gandhi.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 99.

CONCLUSION

A picture of Jesus Christ always hung on the wall of Gandhi's room, be it in South Africa or in India. It makes us understand the reverence that Gandhi held in his heart for Jesus Christ. But this was not the case when he was young. Gandhi, as he came to know about the Christianity and the life of Christians tagged as alcohol and beef eating Christians, as was prevalent at the time, made him dislike Christianity. It was only in England, when he went to study for the bar, that he came to know Jesus Christ and his teachings for the first time. He read the Bible for the first time and one particular verse from the Sermon on the Mount, which says 'Resist not evil' delighted him beyond measure and this became the motto of his life in which he put up the principle for his life. Reading the Bible for the first time made him realize the difference between Christ's Christianity and Western Christianity.

South Africa provided more time and the environment conducive for his religious study and it was there that he did a dispassionate study of all religions. He came in contact with the evangelical Christians who tried their best to convert him to Christianity. He, forever, remained indebted to his Christian contacts for waking up in him the religious quest, even though he took a different path than intended by his Christian friends. Gandhi could not come to reason with the orthodox view of Christianity of Jesus Christ being the only begotten son of God and the only way to salvation. He got more inclined towards heterodox views on Christianity as they helped him value his personal religion. He called himself an agent of the Esoteric Christian Union and began to apply the basic doctrine of the Esoteric Christian Union in his life, as the Christ in the Making.

Gandhi's life gave out the aroma of the Christ and his name was linked with the Christ by his biographers and his contemporaries. But, in actuality, who was Jesus Christ for Gandhi? Gandhi regarded Jesus Christ as the greatest teacher ever born on earth. He interpreted Jesus Christ as the Son of God, not in the literal sense as the orthodox Christians did, but a spiritual birth made Jesus Christ the son of God for Gandhi who followed the will God and was closest to God. So, Gandhi to fulfill his ultimate aim to see God face to face started following the teachings of Jesus Christ and imitated the Christ in his daily life. Gandhi always experimented first with himself before he preached it to the others as a result of which one can see the imprints of the Christ on Gandhi's life. All the major points of break, in Gandhi's life, has been directly or indirectly been affected by the life and teachings of the Christ. Gandhi seems to have taken the idea of forgiveness to one's adversary directly from the life of Jesus Christ. Gandhi's life of austerity, fasting, self-suffering and celibacy had also the influence of Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount made a great impact in the life of Gandhi. The Sermon on the Mount he held was the whole of Christianity and could call himself a Christian with his own interpretation of the Bible. Gandhi started applying the 'imitation of Christ' in his life. Jesus Christ became the example, a teacher and a guide to Gandhi to fulfill his dream to be one with God.

Gandhi did not only want his personal salvation but he wanted the salvation of the whole of India and of humanity for that matter. So, he put out his life as a message to the people to follow him towards the spiritual realization. All his involvement in the political freedom struggle of India and upliftment of the society, its constructive programs, were for the fulfillment of his ultimate goal to see God face to face or to attain *moksha*. For Gandhi, the political liberation and social liberation was winded up together which produced spiritual liberation. So, he worked towards the political

freedom of his country and gave all his life to free the people from the social evils that blinded them. Gandhi's social work was closer to his heart than his political work. Gandhi endeavoured to see God through the service of humanity an idea that emerged with the restoration of Catholic faith. The concept of attainment of *moksha* through the service of humanity was a new concept, not heard of in Hinduism. Gandhi had taken the idea from the missionary work of the Roman Catholic Christians which had started during the counter-reformation period with the establishment of the Society of Jesus. The creed of *Satyagraha*, his political weapon to fight against oppression, also gives out the imprints of the Christ. Gandhi saw all the basic tenets of *Satyagraha*, that is truth, non-violence and self-suffering in the life of Jesus Christ and called him the prince of *satyagrahi*.

Every step he took, every move he made, every single day, every minute he worked for, his ultimate goal was to see God and attain *Moksha* or to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Gandhi himself says that, "I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven which is *moksha*."¹ Gandhi's works in the political and social fields were the steps that he took for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth or *Ramrajya* as he called it. *Ramrajya* for Gandhi was not understood literally as the rule of Ram, a Hindu God or as a golden age as it is understood mostly. For Gandhi, *Ramrajya* was God's rule on earth, the rule of spirit over flesh or the attainment of *moksha* by all human beings. To fulfill his lifelong aim of the attainment of the *moksha* by each person, he opened his life as a book to be followed by the people so that they, in turn, may join hands with him on his march towards *moksha*. The political Gandhi and social Gandhi were the outer masks that guided the religious Gandhi towards his goal.

¹ Prabhu, R. K. & Rao, U. R. (ed) M. K. Gandhi, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, p.7.

The names that come with the Mahatma Gandhi are firstly the political Gandhi and then the social Gandhi but the religious Gandhi, who is in real the one who made Mohandas to Mahatma, is hardly pondered upon. The religious Gandhi's faith in God is what made Gandhi the Mahatma of the people. Gandhi would not be Mahatma if we take out the religious Gandhi out of him. The religious Gandhi, his aims and aspirations, was an integral part of the Mahatma and much closer to the Mahatma than the political or social Gandhi. As Gandhi came to be known as the Mahatma his life has been constantly linked with the Christ. His relationship with Jesus Christ during his life in England and in South Africa, gave growth to the religious Gandhi who had turned somewhat into atheism in his boyhood days. Gandhi, forever, remained indebted to his Christian contacts in South Africa who ignited the religious quest in him. Jesus Christ aided to the growth of the religious Gandhi who in turn aided Gandhi to be the Mahatma. To make it simple, Jesus Christ influenced Gandhi to emerge into the Mahatma of the people.

Gandhi, from the days he came to be known as Mahatma, has been linked with Jesus Christ. His biographers and his contemporaries could not stop themselves from seeing the similarities in Jesus Christ and Gandhi. Gandhi has been labeled as Christ-like, a tintured image of Jesus Christ, a neo-Christian Hindu and a Russian Christian in an Indian body. Throughout his life he was always brought in comparison with Jesus Christ. Even his death was not spared as linking with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Gandhi's life and death ran parallel to that of Jesus Christ as Gandhi tried to imitate Christ. The Christ for him was the greatest teacher humanity had ever had and the son of God not in the literal sense as understood by the orthodox Christians but as one who was closest to God and followed God's will. So, Gandhi in his attempt to reach God followed the footsteps of the greatest teacher and applied the teachings of

the Christ in his life. The imitation of the Christ to fulfill his aim made him to be linked with the Christ.

E. Stanley Jones, declared Gandhi to be ‘one of the most Christlike men in history was not called Christian at all’.² He was also sometimes tagged as a secret Christian because of his imitation of Jesus Christ and his frequent reference to the teachings of the Christ from the Bible. Gandhi considered this both a libel and a complement: “a libel because there are men who believe me to be capable of being secretly anything... a complement in that it is a reluctant acknowledgement of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity”.³ He was not a secret Christian as his life was always an open book to be read by the people but he was just ‘a humble and impartial student of religion with great leanings towards Christianity’.⁴

Gandhi imitated Christ to fulfill his ultimate aim to see God and has been, on a numerous occasions been known to be Christ-like. But was he like Christ in a literal sense? Did Gandhi succeed in becoming like Christ? Gandhi succeeded in imitating Jesus Christ but he was not able to be like Christ in the literal sense; nor did Gandhi intent that. Reading the life of Gandhi, the message he left behind for the world does make us know, that we cannot wash our hands and say we do not find any blemish in the life of Gandhi just as Pontius Pilate did by washing his hands, to not be a part of the crucifixion of the blameless Jesus Christ.

Gandhi is known as the student of the New Testament, but was he influenced by the Old Testament? Out of Gandhi’s four closest friends in South Africa, three

²Fisher, Louis, (2016) *The life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Harper Collins, Noida, p.418.

³Ellsberg, Robert, (1991) *Gandhi on Christianity*, Orbis Books, New York, p. xi.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 31.

were Jews and Hermann Kallenbach, was the closest person Gandhi had in South Africa during the period when he took the first step towards Mahatma. Ramachandra Guha opines that Gandhi was not really influenced by Jewish thought, but looking at the relation Gandhi had with Kallenbach who were known as ‘soulmates’ makes us know that the Jewish thought or the Old testament too had an influence in Gandhi’s thought. The influence of his close associates in South Africa, Henry Polak and Herman Kallenbach, gave a stamp to his heterodox interpretation of the Christ.

Just as Gandhi’s favourite hymn ‘Lead kindly light’, Gandhi’s Christology was a light, who would lead and guide Gandhi to the house of God passing through the gloomy night world. Gandhi with the help of Jesus Christ wanted to fulfill his supreme wish to attain *moksha*. Studying the life of Gandhi, we come to understand the immense influence Jesus Christ had in his life. He not only changed his life according the teachings and the life of the Christ but tried and hoped to live like Christ. He laid his life as an example to the people to read and to learn. Inspired by the sacrifice of the Christ, he too sacrificed his life for the freedom of the people. He understood the nature of the British rulers and how wrong and unlike Christ they were. He showed them the Christ like behavior against them in his march for freedom. The efforts of this great soul did lead to the sun setting in the British Empire.

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